UNCLE TOM ANDY BILL

CHARLES MAJOR

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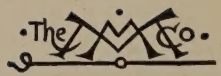

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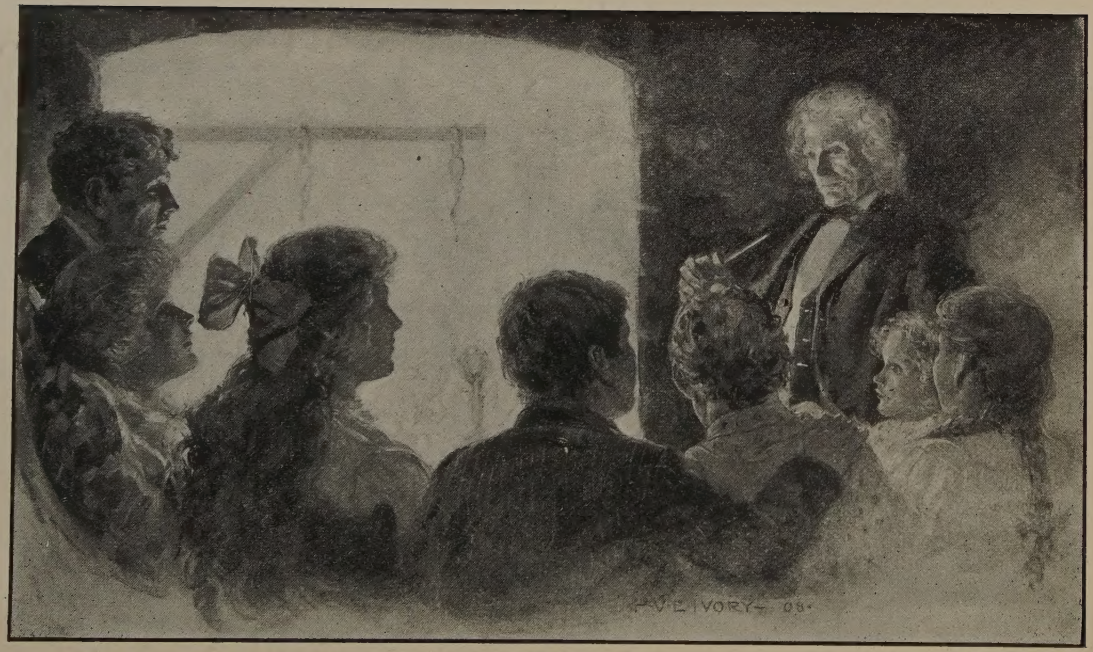

"THE REST OF THE AUDIENCE SAT IN A CIRCLE IN FRONT OF THE HEARTH"

UNCLE TOM ANDY BILL

A STORY OF BEARS AND INDIAN TREASURE

BY

CHARLES MAJOR

AUTHOR OF "WHEN KNIGHTHOOD WAS IN FLOWER," "DOROTHY VERNON OF HADDON HALL," "THE BEARS OF BLUE RIVER," ETC., ETC.

"No man knows how much happiness there is in the world till he hears the birds of the wildwood sing at dawn."

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✕ TO MY WIFE ✕

JUN 3 1937

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UNCLE TOM ANDY BILL

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CHAPTER I

BY THE FIRESIDE

My uncle's name was Thomas Andrew William Addison. His father and mother had three girls and only one boy, so they said they would give him as many names as a boy could stand, to make up, in a manner, for his deficiency in number. His playmates, none of whom could boast more than one name, laughed at his unusual assortment. Some called him Tom, others Andy, and others again found that Bill came trippingly on the tongue. In time the three names amalgamated, and "Tom Andy Bill" fell permanently to his lot. My mother was one of Tom Andy Bill's sisters. She and my father dying when I was very young, my uncle took me to "raise," and warmed me in his great, tender breast.

Uncle Tom Andy Bill was an "old bachelor," though he had reared a family of fourteen children — all adopted. All these

children except one (of her you will hear a great deal in these pages) were nieces or nephews and grand-nieces or grand-nephews whose parents, like mine, had died. You may be sure every member of the adopted family worshipped with unquestioning faith at the shrine of "the Adopter," as some of Tom Andy Bill's older friends lovingly called him.

The mother instinct was so strong in Tom Andy Bill's heart that all his friends regretted he had never married. I remember once hearing two old ladies deplore the fact. One of them said tenderly: —

"Oh, yes, it's too bad. He was the likeliest young man I ever knew — so tall and strong and gentle. He was like a Greek statue in form, and like a hero in bravery and truthfulness and all that was good. His hair was dark and curled about the finest head and the handsomest face I ever saw. No, he never married, but he had a sweetheart once — yes, yes, you know the story. Sad, wasn't it? So sad."

I had long wanted to hear the story, and frequently had tried to learn it; but no one of my generation seemed to know it, though many had heard it mentioned in a

general way as "very sad." None of Uncle Tom Andy Bill's generation would talk on the subject — all the romance, doubtless, having oozed out of them.

Twenty years ago, when Uncle Tom Andy Bill told the following stories, he was quite an old man, but he was still young in heart, and strong and beautiful in person. He was fully six feet two inches high, and as straight as a gray ash arrow. His face was smooth, his glowing dark eyes had lost none of their lustre, and his great shock of waving white hair was a veritable halo of glory. Seven members of the adopted family were still under his roof at the time of which I speak; the other seven had married, or, as Uncle Tom Andy Bill said, "had flown the nest." Of the seven remaining under his care, all were grand-nieces and grand-nephews save Baby Mab and me. I was a nephew, and Mab was — but you shall learn about her as we progress. I'll let Uncle Tom Andy Bill tell her little story and also the story of his sweetheart. They will be short.

I was teaching school, and learning shorthand at the same time, so I practised, taking down Uncle Tom Andy Bill's stories of his

boyhood days as he told them to his family about a winter's fireside, and that is the way I happen to have them to tell to you.

Uncle Tom Andy Bill always sat in his great arm-chair on the right side of the enormous fireplace. He was near the fire so that the smoke from his pipe would go up the chimney. Next to him — very, very close — sat Baby Mab in her tiny rocking-chair. The rest of the audience, ranging in years from Dic, who was ten, to myself (at that time I soared in the empyrean heights of twenty-one), sat in a circle, that is, a half circle, in front of the hearth. The fire furnished light and heat, and plenty of each.

The picture we presented, with rare old Nestor on our right flank, the dancing flames in front lighting up our faces, and the flitting shadows silently playing hide-and-seek in the dark corners of the room behind us, was one worthy of a master's brush. I wish I had it on canvas.

I will not try to reproduce Uncle Tom Andy Bill's inimitable dialect, but will give you his stories as I took them down, redolent, however, of his manner and his style. He was a man of much reading and of con-

siderable culture, but he spoke the language of his friends, and cared a great deal more for what he said than for how he said it. I believe Uncle Tom Andy Bill's stories were, in the main, true, though on rare occasions he may have "idealized" certain incidents for the benefit of his open-eyed, credulous audience. It is almost impossible to resist the temptation to create wonder in those who eagerly believe all one says.

One cold evening, a fortnight before Christmas, Uncle Tom Andy Bill fell into a reminiscent mood, and spoke freely of his boyhood days.

"That was long, long ago, — fifty-odd years back in the heart of time. You all can't imagine how far back fifty years is. One has to live seventy years to understand what it means. When a man of seventy looks back to his boyhood, it is like looking down from a great height at men and women on the earth below. The boy of fifty or sixty years ago looks small and far away, as if he were viewed through a spyglass turned end for end."

"Tell us about the Indian treasure," suggested one of the small boys.

"You want to hear about the Indian treasure, do you?" asked Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "Well, I'll begin at the very beginning and tell you all about it, though it will take a great many evenings to finish the story, and many adventures will happen on the way."

"The more, the better!" shouted every boy and girl in the room. "And we *do* want you to begin at the *very* beginning and tell us all about it right up to the end."

"And we want a lot of bear stories, too," said one of the boys.

"Don't you hope it will take all winter?" whispered one of the small girls.

"Sh! Sh! Sh!" came from several pairs of older lips, and Uncle Tom Andy Bill began.

THE STORY

You see, father and mother came up from Carolina about the year '19 or '20 and settled here in Indiana on Blue River. I was a little fellow, ten or twelve years old, but I remember it all — all. We built our cabin where the old house still stands — down the river, five miles from here, as you all know. I thought father selected the spot close to the

river so that I should not have far to go afishing. He probably had other reasons, but you see the one boy in a family of girls is apt to think that all the spheres of the family system revolve about him. It's bad for a boy to get the notion into his head that he is "the whole thing," for, you see, he has to get it out again. It is knocked out of him later in life, and the more firmly the idea becomes fixed in his head, the harder the knocks must be to loosen it. It cracks many a fool's skull for good and all.

The neighbors for miles around came to help us build our log cabin. When it was finished and the openings between the logs were well "chinked" with mud, father built a great chimney; then we moved in and were as snug as a bug in a rug. After the house was built, father went to work to make a clearing by chopping down trees and grubbing out underbrush.

Oh, how I enjoyed the great bonfires when the neighbors came to help at the "log rolling." Father chopped down the trees and cut them into pieces that could be easily handled. When the neighbors came, they rolled the logs together and piled the brush;

then the torch was applied, and what a sight it was! Talk about your Fourth of July fireworks! Compared to our log fires, they look like a candle beside a burning barn.

Clearing the ground was hard work, but father soon had a fine patch of rich bottom ground cleared of everything but stumps. Stumps! They stood so thick on the ground that you would have thought a dog could not wiggle between them in places, if his backbone happened to be stiff. Here, during the first summer, father raised a small crop of corn and a great number of pumpkins that helped to keep us alive during the winter.

Our chief support was game, of which the deep, black forests were full. Deer, quail, wild turkeys, rabbits, and squirrels infested the whole country; and father, in a few hours' hunting, could easily fill our little kitchen with more venison, as the meat of all wild game was called, than we could eat in a month.

When I was about twelve years old, father bought a rifle for me and began to take me out hunting with him. In addition to venison for the table, we hunted coons, wolves,

foxes, minks, and beavers for the sake of their fur, and father brought home many a dollar from the sale of pelts. In those days there were many bears, too, and for several reasons we loved to hunt them. They killed our sheep and were fonder of pig — a tender little squeaker — than you all are of circus candy. It was impossible to keep them away from our little pigs, and that was one reason we liked to kill the bears. We also liked the meat of a young fat bear, and a good whole bearskin was worth ten shillings, that is, two dollars and a half. If you want to know how big two dollars and a half looked at that time, just go out and take a peep at the full moon. We loved to hunt deer, too, for their meat was delicious and their hides sold for two shillings — fifty cents. Even fifty cents looked big then.

Father and I killed many wolves and foxes, too, but of all the game that prowled the forest, I loved best to hunt bear. There was the spice of danger in it, and when we killed a bear, we not only felt proud of our achievement, but we had something worth while for our labor.

I remember, when I was about fourteen years old, father and I started out one morning to kill a deer. A neighbor boy, who lived one mile down the river from father's house, accompanied us. His name was Balser Brent, and he and I were chums. He had a beautiful gun and was a great hunter for his years. As I have said, we started out to kill a deer, but we found a bear. I suppose if we had started out for a bear, we might have found a deer, so easy is it to get what one does not seek. We got what we didn't seek that day, and got plenty of it.

Along Blue River the settlers had built several houses, and deer, being shy, are apt to stray away from the habitations of their mortal enemy, man. Therefore, father, Balser, and I walked over to Brandywine Creek, three or four miles west of Blue, where we hoped soon to kill a deer, swing it over a pole, and carry it home.

We had with us Balser's dogs, Tige and Prince, and there were not on all Blue River two better hunters than these intelligent animals. They would hunt anything, but they agreed with Balser and me that bear

was the only game really worth the prowess of enterprising men and first-class dogs.

I suppose Tige and Prince knew we were hunting deer that morning, and although they were willing to help, they were not at all enthusiastic. They were watchful and alert, but they did not seem to throw all their energies into the work. We had been on the banks of Brandywine an hour or two, but had not seen a deer even at a distance.

All of us, including the dogs, were growing tired and were inclined to be listless, when suddenly I noticed new life manifest itself in Tige, who was running thirty yards ahead of us. He pricked up his ears and his whole body seemed to be on the alert. He stood for a moment on three legs and gave forth a quick, low bark, which was evidently intended as a remark to Prince, for Prince quickly bounded to his side, and both dogs put their noses to the ground with eagerness and excitement. They consulted for a moment, then they uttered another low, quick bark; this time they were speaking to Balser.

"A bear, sure as you live," said Balser.

"Why do you think so?" asked father.

"Tige and Prince told me so," answered Balser.

Father shook his head, laughed, and answered, "Nonsense, dogs can't talk."

"Can't they, though?" returned Balser. "Now listen. I'll ask them if it's a bear, and if it is, they will answer in a quick, low, excited bark, without lifting their noses from the ground; if it is other game, they will lift their heads and bark louder, or not at all. Is it a bear, Tige?"

Tige answered exactly as his master said he would, and Balser and I ran to the dogs. We could see no tracks, for the ground was dry and covered with leaves. It was the fall of the year.

"Hunt him, Tige! Hunt him, Prince!" said Balser, and the dogs started rapidly on the scent, Balser and I following as fast as we could run. Father had no faith in dog talk, but he walked rapidly after us. Within ten minutes we came to a spring where the ground was soft, and when the dogs passed over the muddy place, we knew we could soon prove or disprove their assertion concerning the bear. If they were on the right scent, we should see bear tracks. Sure

enough, the tracks were there — great, long, fresh tracks, not more than an hour old. I can't explain how an experienced hunter knows the age of a track or a "spoor," as the traces left by an animal are often called by our Dutch friends; but if they are less than a day old, one practised in the art of "spooring" can guess the time at which they were made and will not miss it an hour.

"Father, father!" I cried, "the dogs are right! Here are the tracks of at least two bears. One of them must be as big as a horse; his foot is as long as my arm!"

"If that is true, we had better turn back," said father, laughing; "I don't want to hunt a bear that has a foot on him as long as your arm. I like big bears, but excuse *me*, please."

"Oh, come on, dad! Do hurry," cried I, starting off after Balser and the dogs.

Father stopped to examine the tracks and was soon convinced that the dogs were right, so he followed us. The dogs were running away from us, so eager were they in the chase, and father cried out: —

"Call the dogs, Balser; make them go slowly so that we can keep up with them."

Balser whistled to the dogs and they waited for us. When we came up to them, off we started again in a great hurry; father lagging behind perhaps a hundred yards. Balser and I kept close to the dogs, all going at a very rapid pace; and soon we noticed a short distance ahead of us a little hill. Tige and Prince ran up the hill perhaps twenty-five feet in advance of Balser and me who were running side by side. When the dogs reached the top of the hill, they leaped forward as if they were jumping over a precipice; at the same time giving forth a sharp, angry bark, emphasized by a clear note of surprise.

Balser and I felt sure the dogs had sighted the bears. We knew that the precipice, if there was one, could not be very high, or the dogs would not have taken it, so we did not slacken our speed, but in our eagerness sprang after Tige and Prince, and landed squarely on two huge bears that were lying at the foot of the low, rocky cliff. Balser went first, and I saw him fall on the back of a black monster that had risen to its haunches, having been startled by the dogs. Tige and Prince had jumped far over the

bears and had landed at the top of a steep little declivity, down which they rolled twenty or thirty feet to the bottom. They were so confused by their tumble that they spun round and round for a moment like a dog chasing its tail.

I was going too fast to stop when I saw Balser fall upon the bear, and although I distinctly heard him cry out, "Don't jump, Tom Andy Bill!" I had to jump, and down I went. You see I didn't want Balser to have *all* the fun of riding the bears, so when I fell I knocked him out of the saddle, so to speak, and took his place. Balser fell toward the other bear, which had also risen to its haunches. In his effort to roll away from the bear, Balser came to the top of the little hill and unceremoniously rolled down after the dogs, leaving me to ride the bear alone.

To say that all of us, including the bears, were surprised and frightened, doesn't begin to express the true condition. I never was so scared; that is, I never had been up to that time. Afterward I was,— but that will come later. I hardly knew what I was doing, and when I felt the huge brute squirming and twisting under me in its efforts to

get on its feet, I threw my arms about its neck and clung to it as a trick rider clings to a bucking horse. I don't know why I hung on, but instinct seemed to tell me that I was safer on top of the bear than I would be if it were on top of me, so I clung to its back with a persistency worthy of a better cause. Balser's gun had fallen from his hands; but mine was strapped across my back, and of course I kept it with me.

The bears were as badly frightened as we were, so when the black fellow, upon whose back I was clinging like a monkey to a goat, had gained its feet, it instinctively bolted for safety; that is, it hurriedly entered a cave that ran into the rocks at the bottom of the little precipice over which we had so rashly jumped. Not knowing what else to do, I still clung to the bear, and into the cave we went together. Soon after the bear entered the cave I realized my danger, and knew that I ought to have dismounted outside; but by the time my slow brain had turned the thought over, it was too late, for right back of me came the other bear, growling like young thunder and throwing the gravel and leaves about like a thing possessed.

The cave, I afterward learned, was only forty or fifty feet deep, though it was rather dark, because the opening was small and almost covered by overhanging branches. But I thought the bear was carrying me to the very bowels of the earth. Of course, the time which seemed so long to me was in reality only a few seconds, but I never want to live through another few seconds like those. Presently my head came in violent contact with the wall of the cave, and the stones did for me what I ought to have done for myself, — that is, they knocked me from the bear's back.

I lay on the floor of the cave for a moment, half stunned, and the other bear in its haste walked right over me as if I were a log. I tried to rise to my feet, but just at that moment Tige and Prince entered the cave, barking furiously, and the bears charged them with equal ferocity. In charging the dogs, the bears also charged me, so over I went again and the bears went over me. My buckskin clothing was torn in shreds by the bears as they clawed me in their efforts to reach the dogs, and I was scratched and bruised from head to foot. In a moment

the dogs and bears were fighting viciously, but unfortunately they were between me and the mouth of the cave. I remember sitting on the ground and wondering if Balser and father would ever come to my rescue. The din raised by the barking of the dogs and the angry growling of the bears was something terrific.

The strap had broken, and my gun had fallen two or three yards from where I sat. Instinct must have prompted me to try to get the gun, for I am sure all power of distinct thought had been knocked and scratched out of me. Although I could not think rationally, I vividly remember every little incident connected with that awful fight in the cave. I remember crawling to my gun and examining it to see if it was broken; I remember a shiver of joy — it could have been nothing but a shiver — when I found that the gun was uninjured; I also remember the fight between the dogs and the bears.

Tige and Prince surely were the bravest dogs that ever lived, and were as nimble as cats. The huge, clumsy bears charged them, striking viciously with their great horny paws, but the dogs nimbly retreated

and as nimbly rushed back upon their foes, inflicting ugly wounds with their sharp teeth, and again retreating before the bears could deliver a deadly stroke. Once, however, I remember that the larger bear landed fairly on poor Prince, and the devoted dog in turn landed against the stone wall of the cave with a force that, it seemed to me, would not only break every bone in his body, but might also crack the rock. The poor dog lay stunned and bruised for a moment, staggered to his feet, and limped again into the midst of the fray. Although I had been in the cave but a few seconds, my eyes were growing used to the gloom, and as the bears were between me and the light, I could clearly distinguish their forms.

I recovered my gun, and with the familiar weapon once more in my hands, rational consciousness seemed to return. Then I began to cast around in my mind for some way to help my friends, Tige and Prince. Time and again the bears charged the dogs and retreated, but when they retreated they backed toward me and often came so close to where I was sitting that I would gladly have moved further into the cave had

I been able to push the stone wall with me.

When the larger bear came very close to me, I hastily rose to my feet, but my left leg gave way under me and down I went to the floor again. In my excitement I felt no pain, but I knew something was wrong with my leg. It had never before deserted me in time of danger, but had always carried me away as fast as any boy could run. I never was very brave, and there is nothing so useful to an inquisitive coward as a good pair of legs. I do not believe that one should "fight and run away, and live to fight another day"; my motto always has been, "run away before the fight, and keep your skin all whole and tight." I was disappointed in my leg for the first time, and on a very important occasion.

I crawled back as far as I could from the bears and sat upright with my back against the wall of the cave. Soon I noticed that the bears and the dogs were gradually moving backward toward me, and I knew that my poor body would soon furnish them a battle-ground. They would be fighting over me.

Fright seemed to clear my brain. I brought my gun to my shoulder, intending to try to shoot one of the bears in case it came near me. The fight between the dogs and the bears waged furiously, the bears alternately retreating toward me and again charging viciously upon the dogs. For a time the bears did not come as near to me as I desired for a shot. I determined to be sure of my aim, for I knew there was but one bullet between me and death — the one in my gun. If I wounded the bear and did not kill it, I knew I should not live to load another gun, so the precious bullet must find lodgement either in the brain or in the heart of the great brute.

Could I kill one of the bears, the other probably would make a dash for liberty, or the dogs would occupy its attention, and I might reach the mouth of the cave unmolested. I grew impatient when the bear did not come toward me, and after waiting a short time foolishly resolved to fire. I had raised my gun to my shoulder, when suddenly the cave became dark and I could barely distinguish the form of the bear, so I lowered my gun. The next instant, with a

mixed feeling of horror and joy, I saw my father's form against the light, right in line with the bear. Had I shot and missed the bear, I surely should have killed my father.

The bears also saw my father and retreated backward toward me. One of them, the larger one, left the fight first and in its haste at self-preservation, came within a yard of me. Now was my chance!

I distinctly remember saying to myself: "Make haste slowly, Tom Andy Bill, for you or this bear will die within the next minute." I therefore deliberately brought my gun to my shoulder, aimed as accurately as possible at the bear's heart, and pulled the trigger. There was a blinding flash, a terrific roar, and I felt as if a mule had tried to kick me through the stone wall, so violent was the rebound of the gun. Immediately after I fired I saw the huge black brute spring into the air, and then it fell upon me. I felt the sharp bristles of its neck prick my face. I remember feeling the blood from its wound trickling through my clothing, and after that I knew nothing until I awakened in bed at home several hours later.

My father and Balser told me the story of

the happenings outside the cave during the little eternity I spent inside with the dogs and the bears.

My father said that when he came up to the brink of the precipice over which Balser, I, and the dogs had disappeared, he could see no one, and supposed that we had all hurried forward. Balser, of course, was at the foot of the hill, and I had ridden the bear into the cave, where the dogs had followed me. Father called and presently Balser answered from below; then father ran to him, crying:

"Where is Tom Andy Bill?"

"I don't know," returned Balser. "Isn't he up there with the bears?"

"Bears?" cried father. "There are no bears here."

"Well, they *are* there — two big ones. Tom Andy Bill and I jumped right down on them. I rolled down hill and — Lordy, where on earth are Tom Andy Bill and the dogs? Tom Andy B-i-l-l!!" cried Balser.

There was no response, for I, of course, could not have heard thunder in the terrific din the bears and the dogs were making in the cave. Father and Balser called me and looked everywhere, but it seemed as if the

earth had opened and swallowed me. The mouth of the cave was almost hidden by bushes and father did not at once discover it. After looking about for two or three minutes, he came close to the opening and indistinctly heard the barking of the dogs.

The noise coming from the cave seemed to shoot out into the woods as a bullet is shot from a gun. Father was deceived by the peculiar effect, and thought the voices of the dogs came from a spot opposite the mouth of the cave. He and Balser, therefore, ran in the direction whence the sound seemed to come, and so were led away from me. When they failed to find me and the dogs, they were greatly alarmed and could not imagine what had become of us. Presently Balser said: —

"I know they are up there on the top of the hill, near that little cliff, some place. I certainly had not left them thirty seconds when you came!"

They hurried back to the vicinity of the cave and began to search the place carefully. All these mishaps and misunderstandings consumed perhaps four or five minutes, during which time it is one of the seven wonders

that the bears had not killed me. Balser soon found the mouth of the cave, and father came to my rescue. His eyes being unused to the darkness, he could not see far into the cave, but he heard the conflict between the dogs and the bears, and he knew that I was in the midst of it.

Father said he heard me cry out, though I was unconscious of an effort to do anything but to get through the stone wall at the back of the cave. Father said he saw the flash of my gun and did not stop for bears, darkness, or anything. He ran in to save me, if possible. He found the large bear lying on top of me and supposed I was dead. He said he did not see the other bear, but Balser saw it and felt it too. When I fired and killed the bear next me, the other one must have concluded to get out of the cave, for it started for fresh air just as Balser was stooping to enter. There was a collision, and Balser took another trip down hill. He said if he had rolled down that hill many more times he would have acquired the habit.

Father pulled me out from under the bear, and he and Balser carried me home on a litter made from the limbs of a tree. A

neighbor went next day and brought home the bear, and father gave me the ten shillings he received for its skin. The other bear got away, but Balser and I thought we found it afterward, as I will tell you to-morrow evening, if I don't go to church.

Silence ensued for a moment or two, and little Mab, who had sat open-eyed long after the Sandman's visit was due, said: —

"Well, I hope you won't go to church, Uncle Tom Andy Bill."

Dic, who sat near her and was thankful for the suggestion, seconded her motion with: —

"You bet!"

Mab slept in a cosey little room adjoining Uncle Tom Andy Bill's, and the door between the rooms was always kept open so that she need not be afraid.

"I suppose I'll be frightened to death to-night, Uncle Tom Andy Bill," said Mab, "and if I am, I am coming into your bed."

"All right, honey," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill.

Then the two arose and started to bed, Baby Mab leading him by the favorite finger.

CHAPTER II

THE WOLVES AND THE POWDER KEG

We all recognized the fact that five-year-old Mab was Uncle Tom Andy Bill's favorite. He cared for her as tenderly as a mother cares for her babe. Her large gray eyes looked one squarely in the face and never flinched from any gaze. It was the most perfect example of "baby stare" I have ever known. One could not lie to those eyes without feeling that they were looking right down into one's bad heart. She was not conscious that a lie could be uttered by herself or by any one else. She had not reached her school majority, six, but she attended my school.

Upon the day after Uncle Tom Andy Bill's story, I noticed Mab whispering to her neighbor across the aisle.

"What are you talking about, Mab?" I asked.

She quickly straightened up, blushed, and

said, "I just whispered to Dic that I hoped Uncle Tom Andy Bill would not go to church to-night."

"Was that all you said? You have been talking a long time," I suggested.

Without a moment's hesitation, Mab answered, "I said maybe he would go to church and come home late, and tell another story to the older ones, and I said if he did, I just *could* not stay awake that long."

"Was that all?" I again asked, for I loved to hear her explanations. They were marvellous specimens of unique and unvarnished truth.

"No, that wasn't all," said Mab; "I said I expect it's wrong for me to wish that Uncle Tom Andy Bill wouldn't go to church, for he might be damned, and that would hurt him."

A ripple of laughter ran over the room.

"What does 'damned' mean, Mab?" I asked.

Mab hesitated for a moment, and answered somewhat haltingly: —

"I don't know exactly, but the preacher said if you didn't go to church, you would be damned; and when old Bill Grumpers told

Pat Hillis to 'be damned,' he hit him with his fist and knocked Pat down, and I don't want any one to knock Uncle Tom Andy Bill down."

"I should hope not," said I, fighting my desire to laugh. Then I asked, "Have you said all you want to say to Dic?"

"Yes, for a little while," answered Mab. Another wave of laughter ran through the room, and I turned my face to the wall.

Whispering in school is a terrible crime; but when Mab had anything to say, I did not try to cork it in, for it would get out in some way. At the end of ten minutes I saw the familiar expression of eager inquisitiveness come upon her face, and I knew that something interesting would soon happen. I tried to keep her from catching my eye, but it was impossible to dodge the beseeching little face. Presently she held up her chubby hand, and I asked: —

"What is it, Mab?"

She sprang to her feet in the aisle and anxiously inquired: —

"Do you think any one would damn Uncle Tom Andy Bill clear down to the ground if he doesn't go to church to-night?"

I had urgent business at the blackboard, and the school enjoyed another wave of laughter.

I knew that Mab's tender little heart was brooding over possible future trouble for her friend of friends, so I turned to her and said:

"No one will hurt Uncle Tom Andy Bill, Mab, even if he doesn't go to church, so you need not worry about it."

A happy, contented expression at once came to the baby girl's face, and the question of Uncle Tom Andy Bill's "damnation" was settled, at least for the time being.

That evening at the supper table, Mab, who sat next to Uncle Tom Andy Bill, whispered: —

"Are you going to church to-night?"

"No. Why, Mab?" asked Uncle Tom.

"Because maybe you'll tell us another story," answered Mab.

"Did you like the one last night?" asked the story-teller.

"Yes," eagerly responded Mab.

"Why?"

"Because it frightened me and made me feel so nice and shivery, and made my feet cold."

Uncle Tom Andy Bill laughed softly, and said: —

"Those surely are delightful sensations. We'll see about it after supper."

"Let's hurry and eat," said Dic, and every one, including myself, did hurry.

After supper the boys eagerly built a huge fire in the fireplace. Mab got Uncle Tom's pipe, drew her chair close to his side, and a most flattering hush fell upon the expectant audience.

Tom Andy Bill silently smoked his pipe, and the audience soon got restless. After waiting a few minutes, Mab came across the hearth to me, and said in a whisper that could be heard all over the room: —

"Tell him to *please* begin."

Mab, as usual, "got a laugh," as the actors say. Uncle Tom laughed too, and said: —

"I can't tell a story as it ought to be told. I'm too ignorant and haven't the gift of —"

A chorus of protests silenced the modest one, and in a moment he continued: —

"I don't know just what to tell you," said he. "There are lots of things I might tell you about. I am eager to tell you about the Indian treasure, but so many things happened

to Balser and me both before and after we learned about it that I am afraid I will have to tell you several stories to let you know the full history. After we learned about the treasure, it, of course, was the one great thought on our minds, but in our effort to discover it, a great many adventures befell us; and I believe I will tell you the little history of our boyhood life at that time, and bring in the events in the order in which they happened."

THE STORY

This evening I'll tell you a story about the night Balser and I spent in a tree. I recollect it vividly. It was midwinter and it *was* cold. Snow had come early that year, and after it had covered the ground and festooned the trees, the cold weather began in earnest and remained in earnest until spring. The Indians have a proverb: "Cold weather makes good fur," and they are right. Providence never sends an evil without at the same time sending a compensating good. If He sends a cold winter, He also gives the animals a thick, beautiful coat of fur to keep them warm. After a week or two of very

cold weather, the fur grows thick and glossy; therefore pelts taken in a cold season are far more valuable and beautiful than those taken during a warm, open winter.

When the cold snap began, Balser and I got our traps ready, polished our guns, sharpened our knives, moulded bullets, and invested every dollar we could raise in powder. We also cut a great number of hazel forks. These were forked branches of the hazel bush, and were used in stretching pelts. When a small, fur-bearing animal, as the beaver, mink, or weasel, was caught, it was killed by a blow on the head to avoid injuring the pelt. Then a slit was made in the skin of the hind legs of the animal, and the pelt was drawn over the head as Mab pulls her stocking over her foot and finds it wrong side out when she gets it off. When the pelt was removed from the body, the fur was inside and the skin was shaped like a sack. Into this sack we thrust the hazel forks, allowing the prongs to spring apart and stretch the pelt. It was then hung up to cure. It would, of course, cure better in cold weather; in warm weather we had to treat it with arsenic.

I was only fifteen years old at the time of which I speak, but I bought the forty acres of ground on which this house stands with my share of the money realized from the sale of the pelts taken by Balser and me that winter. Of course the land was cheap.

One day, Balser and I being all ready, we started out with the dogs, Tige and Prince. We took a sleigh loaded with traps, guns, tanned bearskins, potatoes, beans, corn-meal, lard, butter, and all the provisions we would need except meat. We could easily kill quails, rabbits, and deer enough to keep us in meat for six months if the weather remained cold.

A donkey belonging to Balser drew the sled. We called the donkey "Solomon" because he looked so wise; and he in no way belied his appearance or his name. He had an enormous head, and was more of a philosopher than the average school-teacher. He was as peaceful as a Quaker, but, like the Quakers, he could fight like forty wild-cats if occasion arose, as you will agree when I tell you the story of his fight with a pack of wolves.

Balser, I, and the dogs started out before

sun-up one morning, and by noon we reached a small cabin that we had built on the banks of Brandywine, eight or ten miles distant from home. The cabin consisted of one small room and a mud-plastered stick chimney. The ground was our floor and the clapboard roof was our ceiling; therefore, although the logs were chinked tightly with mud and grass, the cabin was hardly as warm as an oven when the weather was at its coldest, though it was cosey enough if the wind did not blow.

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During the summer and fall Balser and I had prepared for this expedition by cutting a huge pile of firewood and stacking it near the cabin door. We also harvested a great quantity of marsh grass that served to make our beds, and to feed Solomon. The donkey, however, was not confined to a diet of marsh grass, for we took with us corn and oats for the wise one. Balser said that oats was good brain food, and that Solomon's great brain would need sustenance.

Thus provided for, Solomon on Brandywine was as happy a donkey as ever lived, for he, following the example of his master, seemed to love the wild life we were living

in the trackless forest. There was hay for his manger and hay for his bed, and there were corn and oats in plenty; so after he was installed in his little log stable, all he had to do was to eat, sleep, and sing, and he did all three with the entire energy of his forceful nature. At times, growing lonesome deep in the night, he would sing to us from his stable, nor would he cease until Balser answered him in his own language; then he would go to sleep and sing no more till he was hungry next morning. We needed no alarm to waken us; Solomon was a veritable town clock, and no one could have slept while he poured forth his soul in song.

Solomon's stable was built a hundred yards south of our hut, very close to the banks of the creek. Our purpose in building it so far away was to use it, not only as a stable, but as a magazine for our powder, which we wished to store as far away as possible from our fire. We wrapped the powder keg in bearskins, and placed it just inside the door of Solomon's stable.

I remember well our first winter day at the cabin. Oh, but it was cold! Our hands and feet were like pieces of ice when we

reached our destination. Solomon had been working very hard, and he was warm; but Balser declared when we stopped at the cabin that the donkey was trying to tell us that the tips of his long ears were frozen, so we held a handful of snow to them for a moment to draw out the frost, and Solomon seemed grateful. He was of so grateful a nature that I believe he would have thanked us for a kick if he felt that it was administered for his good.

After arriving at the cabin, our first task was to unhitch Solomon and put him in the stable, which was as warm and cosey a shelter as any donkey could ask; then we gave him a good feed of corn and filled his manger with sweet hay. Solomon, when fairly installed, sang a little song of thanksgiving and fell upon the corn and hay with a zest that would have done your heart good to see.

Then we carried a great armful of wood into the cabin, spread our bed with sweet-smelling hay, and lighted a roaring fire in the fireplace. We warmed our hands and feet, ate dinner, and brought the sled-load of traps, provisions, etc., into the cabin,

where we stored them on shelves about the walls. At four o'clock, everything being in its place, we took our guns and went out to kill a rabbit for supper. This was quickly done. We skinned the rabbit, placed it on the ice in the creek, and covered it with snow to cool the meat; then we went into the cabin, built up the fire afresh, and prepared supper.

When the potatoes and corn-bread were nearly baked, we brought in the rabbit, cut it in pieces, and placed it on the coals to broil. When the meat was well done, we sat down on our chairs at the table and ate our supper. My life, how we did eat! You notice I said we sat down on our chairs at the table. The chairs were two small stumps, and the table was a large one standing between the chairs. These three stumps we had left within the cabin. We had smoothed the tops with a saw and had chopped away all obtruding roots and bark.

When supper was finished, we sat gazing into the fire, talking a little and dreaming a great deal, until we were startled by a most tremendous noise coming from a short way down the creek. We sprang to our feet

somewhat frightened, but soon we laughed and exclaimed: —

"Solomon is singing for corn!"

I went to the stable, led Solomon to the creek, where we had cut a hole in the ice, gave him a drink, took him back, fed him his corn and fresh hay, made a soft, warm bed for him to lie on, and closed his stable door for the night.

When I got back to the cabin, Balser had cleared up the supper table by the simple process of throwing the scraps and the rabbit bones to the dogs.

Being very tired, we were almost ready for bed. We each had a bearskin sleeping-bag, so, after we had banked the fire, we crept into our bags and slept until we heard the voice of Solomon calling for corn. Next day we placed our traps and began hunting.

I don't recollect that any adventure worth telling befell us during the first two weeks of our residence on Brandywine. The beaver dams were all frozen in, and although there were two large ones within a mile of us, we had caught only three of the little animals during the first fortnight. We had, however, killed a large number of minks, weasels,

and muskrats, and had taken no less than six red foxes with the most beautiful coats and brushes I have ever seen.

We had also killed a fat young bear, that furnished meat for ourselves and the dogs, and had shot two gray wolves. For the tails of these wolves we would receive a bounty of fifty cents each from the county, and the wolf pelts, taken during the cold winter, were so perfect that we hoped to receive not less than a dollar apiece for them.

Aside from bear and beaver, the wolf was the most valuable game we could take, but it was also the hardest to find, the most difficult to kill when found, and the most dangerous to pursue if found in packs. We could set no trap that would take them. We tried every way to conceal the traps, but the wolves always scented the danger and avoided it. To secure a wolfskin, one must shoot the wolf.

For two weeks the story of our life was the same from day to day. We breakfasted soon after sun-up, visited our traps and hunted until noon, stretched the pelts in the afternoon, stored them in Solomon's stable, ate our supper, sat before the great

blazing fire, talking and dreaming, crept into our sleeping-bags, and slept until morning. At the expiration of two weeks something *did* happen.

One night Balser and I were sitting before the fire. We had killed a wolf that day.

"I wish we had a hundred wolf skins and tails," said he.

"I'd like to have a thousand," said I.

"Tom Andy Bill, you always were a pig," returned Balser.

"If I'm going to be a pig at all, I'll be a big one," said I. "You're a pig for wanting a hundred wolf pelts. The only difference between us is in size."

We laughed and continued to talk about wolves until we were sleepy. Then we crept into our bearskin bags and dreamed about wolves.

In the middle of the night Balser wakened me, saying: —

"Listen to Solomon, Tom Andy Bill. Something is wrong."

I listened and heard Solomon's plaintive voice borne in upon the cold night air.

"He wants his corn," said I. "Confound him, I wish he wouldn't get hungry so early."

"It's not early," said Balser. "It is surely not past midnight. Solomon is not singing for corn. He is in trouble. Listen, Tom Andy Bill, listen! Wolves! Wolves!"

The dogs, sleeping in front of the fire, began to bark. I silenced them, and Balser and I listened. Soon the howling of the wolves began again, far away at first, but coming nearer and nearer every moment. Balser got out of his sleeping-bag, stirred the fire to make a light, and reached for his gun, powder-horn, and bullet bag. I quickly followed his example.

The odor from the pelts in Solomon's stable had attracted the wolves, and we must go to the rescue of our friend and our treasure. When we had taken down our guns, we again paused to listen, and soon caught the wolfish refrain. It seemed to be almost upon us, and judging from the frightful noise they made, we thought surely the woods was full of them. In the lulls between their spells of howling, we distinctly heard Solomon calling wildly for help. There was a note in his cry that was plainly different from his corn song. We hesitated to leave the cabin, for of all the dangers a

hunter has to encounter, a pack of hungry wolves on a cold night is the greatest; but we could not leave Solomon and his treasure to the mercy of the wolves. They would soon tear down the poorly constructed door of his stable and then — good-by to Solomon and all his glory! Hard pressed by fear, we reluctantly marched to the rescue. In the battle we were to fight, the dogs would be of no help to us; the wolves would devour them before they could have a chance even to bark. So we left them in the cabin and shut the door upon them.

When we got outside, we found the night very cold and clear. The moon was full and the light upon the snow almost turned night into day. At the door of Solomon's stable we saw two wolves, and Balser said: —

"By George, I believe there are only two of them. Who would have thought that two wolves could make all that noise?"

"They didn't make it," said I. "There's a big pack close by, you may depend on it, and we had better stay near home. We'll take a shot at our friends over there by the stable door, but let's keep the way of retreat clear to our own door."

I was about to shoot when Balser said: —

"Don't shoot from here, Tom Andy Bill. If you miss the wolves, the bullet might go through the door or between the logs of the stable, and then poor old Solomon might come to grief. Let us go around to the other side, where we can shoot at the wolves without endangering Solomon's life."

We went toward the other side of the stable and soon found ourselves in the deep, black forest. The stable was now between us and the cabin, and I suggested to Balser the danger of the pack cutting off our retreat. By the time we were ready to shoot at the wolves we had seen near the stable door, they had disappeared, and we heard a frightful din like the howling of a host of demons let loose upon the world. The thing we had feared had come to pass. The howling came nearer and nearer. We knew then that a large pack of wolves, led, probably, by one of the two that had been at the stable door, was approaching. We started to run for the cabin, but we were too late; the wolves had cut off our retreat. When they saw us, they at once charged in our direction. We fired into the pack, but while we must have

killed at least two of their number, we did not check their onrush.

"Run for your life and climb a tree," cried Balser.

But I was running before he had uttered the first word of warning, and he was coming after me as fast as he could run. We were so frightened that we made wonderful speed and soon reached a tree that we could climb, standing twenty yards from Solomon's stable. We could not climb rapidly, being encumbered with our guns, so we threw them to the ground and started up the tree without them. I went first. I hurried to get out of Balser's way and was none too quick, for the wolves were swarming about the tree just as Balser drew his feet up out of their reach. I tell you, those were busy times! It did not take us long to straddle a limb, and to thank heaven that we were not on the ground. Had we been at the root of the tree, the wolves would have torn us to pieces in less time than Mab could say "Christmas."

The limb on which Balser and I found refuge was not more than ten feet from the ground, and the hungry wolves, in their

desperation, sprang almost up to us. Of course, they could not jump ten feet into the air, but they forced us to draw up our feet so quickly and so often that Balser said he felt as though he were dancing a jig.

The noise the wolves made was terrifying beyond anything you can imagine. We were safe for the time, but we were terribly frightened, and although we were accustomed to danger, the strain upon our nerves was all that we could bear.

I do not know what hour it was when we climbed the tree, but I do know that it seemed ages while we waited through the long cold night, listening to the awful wolf concert. After a long, shivering silence, Balser said:—

"Their noise is not pleasant, but I hope the wolves will remain here howling at us. I hope they will not think of attacking Solomon. If he keeps still, perhaps they will forget him, and when they find they cannot reach us, they may go away."

"Don't build any hopes on their going away," I answered; "hungry wolves never let up."

We sat in the tree hour after hour, and

the wolves did not desert us. My life, but it was cold! I thought my very blood would freeze. We watched the east, hoping for the break of dawn, but the sun seemed to be stuck down below the horizon somewhere, and I almost lost hope for the dawning of another day. Balser and I sat very close to each other to save what warmth we could. When he grew drowsy, I did all in my power to arouse him, and he performed the same service for me. Great cold produces drowsiness, and if sleep should overtake one under conditions such as ours were, all hope is lost; one is apt to freeze to death. But in our case there was a danger to be feared from sleep greater than that of freezing. If we became unconscious, we might fall to the ground, and then the good Lord only could help us.

The pack of wolves howling under us was the largest I ever saw. They numbered at least fifteen. All of them seemed of tremendous size, but the captain or leader was the largest wolf I have ever seen. These sagacious animals choose a leader with more deliberation and, in many instances, with more intelligence than we use in selecting our officers.

At intervals the wolves would become quiet for a time, and peace would reign for a minute or two, but the big, hungry captain would soon jump for us again, uttering a terrific howl. He might have been called the "howl master," for, like a singing teacher, he gave the key-note and the wolf choir took up the refrain.

I cannot at all describe to you the tedious, frightful hours of fear and pain we passed in the tree, but, after what seemed a lifetime of agony, we saw a few faint gray streaks coming in the east, followed by a blush of pink, and soon the sun was up. We had hoped that the wolves would leave at sunrise, but they clung to us with a persistency that we could have admired in a better cause.

"I believe they have forgotten Solomon," said I.

"Yes," answered Balser; "I wish they would forget us, but they never will. There's not a house within five miles, and no one will come near us till spring. I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, if the wolves hold out much longer, they will get one good square meal, and its name will be Balser. I can't endure this much longer. I'm almost dead, and I know my toes are frozen."

I, too, was hardly alive, but I spoke cheeringly when my chattering teeth would allow me to speak at all, and said:—

"You're not half dead yet, Balser, and you'll see the wolves will go away before noon."

"No, they won't," declared Balser. "They howled around father's palisade for two whole days, trying to get at our sheep. One wolf, if alone, will howl and run away, but a dozen will howl to keep each other's courage up and will hang on like grim death."

Soon after sun-up Solomon began to sing for corn. Poor beast! He did not know the true state of affairs or he would have sung for danger. The donkey's voice caught the attention of the wolf leader. He stood for a moment with his ears cocked forward; then he started for the stable, and the pack followed, howling like mad.

The real sum total of a man's life seems to be made up of a multitude of little things, as the vast ocean beach is made up of tiny grains of sand. Even the few great things that happen in his life seem to hang upon an insignificant act done or left undone. Upon one of these little acts hung our fate, and

Solomon's, at the dawning of that bright winter morning.

The little peg upon which our fate hung was the fact that Balser and I had swung the door of Solomon's stable to open in instead of out. The door consisted of small poles spliced together and swung by thongs of wild grape-vines to a small upright post that constituted one side of the door frame. The construction was rough and not very strong.

Had the door opened outward, the wolves could not have battered it down by jumping against it, and while Solomon would perhaps have been safer, we should have been lost; for Balser was right, the wolves would not have left us. We could not have held out much longer in the tree, and there's no "give up" to a pack of hungry wolves. They would have remained with us, I do believe, till doomsday, had we held out so long, if they had been unable to break in the flimsy door of Solomon's stable. When we built the stable we had intended to hang the door swinging outward, but in our haste to finish our work, we hung it swinging in the stable, and after it was hung we did not care to take it down.

When the wolves left us, they made a dash for Solomon, and soon his corn song changed to a cry for help. The wolves circled about the stable, searching for the weakest place and howling like demons. Don't tell me a wolf can't reason. The leader examined every log and opening in the structure and discovered the door almost as quickly as a man would have found it. We could see the captain and his pack clearly, for by this time the sun was high above the horizon. Our hearts ached for poor Solomon, for we loved him and we felt that his fate was sealed.

The wolves seemed to hold a consultation for a moment at the door; then the leader said something to the pack, and they all ran back from the stable a distance of perhaps sixty feet. Then, like a rock from a catapult, they threw themselves upon the stable door. The grape-vine hinges were tough, and the first onslaught failed to break them. Disappointed in their attack, the wolves seemed to hold a second council of war.

"Rub my hands, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser, hurriedly; "rub them and pound them! Do anything to bring back the blood

so that I can grip the tree and slide down to get the guns."

I belabored poor Balser's half-frozen hands and soon restored the life to them. Then he quickly slipped down the tree, handed the guns up to me, and made ready to climb back to our perch upon the limb. While he was standing at the foot of the tree, rubbing his hands, the wolves started in our direction.

"The wolves, the wolves!" I cried; "they are coming! Hurry or they will be on you!"

Balser grasped the tree, but his hands were so cold and he was so nearly frozen that he made poor headway. He thought he was lost, for he knew the wolves had seen him, and were coming toward him like a howling gray wave of an angry sea. I, too, expected Balser to be torn to pieces before my eyes, but for some reason the wolves paused a second or two, and I, catching Balser by the hand, pulled him up to safety.

The powder-horns and bullet bags were hanging by their strings about our necks, so when Balser was once more seated beside me, we rubbed each other's stiff hands, until

we manipulated them into a condition sufficiently supple to load our guns.

The wolves howled at our tree for only a moment. Having failed to catch Balser, they returned to their attack upon Solomon's door, and repeated their former tactics. They retreated fifty or sixty feet and then made a mighty onrush with a howl in concert that must have frozen poor Solomon's blood.

When the wolf wave dashed against the door the second time, it partially gave way, but did not fall in. In their effort to complete their work, the wolves gathered about the door in a dense mass. By that time Balser and I had loaded our guns, and when the wolves were huddled together, we fired into them. We must have killed at least two, but our shots had no apparent effect upon the attacking force. We loaded and fired again, but we did not in the least disturb the enemy. Again the pack retreated, and again they rushed upon the frail door. This time it fell in, and we felt that it was all over with Solomon.

But, intimate as we had been with Solomon, we did not fully know him, nor had we any adequate idea of the tremendous reserve

power in his heels. The door, fortunately, was narrow, and only two or three wolves could pass through it at the same time. When it fell, the wolves rushed in, but they rushed out again, one by one, in quick succession. They came out as if they had been shot out of a gun, and several of them fell many feet away after describing a beautiful curve over the backs of their friends outside of the stable.

With the rocket-like exit of each wolf Balser and I caught glimpses of Solomon's twinkling hoofs, elevated at an angle which indicated that their owner was trying to stand on his head. The hoofs were shod with sharp steel calks for ice travelling, and they must have inflicted terrible punishment upon those wolves that were unfortunate enough to become acquainted with them.

Again and again the wolves attacked the brave donkey, but his heels soon taught them caution and they became wary. Persistently they kept up the battle, and it seemed as if Solomon could not hold out much longer against such odds. Soon two or three wolves would effect an entrance, and would pull poor old Solomon down

to death. In the midst of the unequal conflict, I noticed a large, bulky object fly out through the door from Solomon's heels. It fell perhaps thirty feet from the stable and rolled a few feet farther, stopping thirty-five or forty feet from us.

"There goes our powder keg!" cried Balser; "Solomon has kicked it out."

The wolves left the stable door and fell upon the powder keg. At first we could not understand what use they could make of the powder, but we soon remembered that we had wrapped the keg in bearskins to keep the powder dry, and we knew that the wolves were devouring the skins. The hungry beasts pounced upon the keg and formed a pyramid of wolves above it. They fought for the bearskins, and were piled on top of one another like a mass of swarming bees.

I drew up my gun and fired into the mass. My shot produced no apparent effect. Balser fired immediately afterward, and his shot produced a decided effect — a most wonderful effect. A terrific explosion that almost knocked us from the tree followed Balser's shot, and the pack of wolves was nearly exterminated. When the smoke drifted away,

we saw wolves dead and wounded lying about us in all directions, and not a live, unwounded wolf was to be seen. Those that had escaped death or mutilation had fled in terror.

We climbed down from the tree, ran to the house for the axe and hatchet, and killed more wolves in five minutes than I have ever killed in five years.

"How do you suppose it happened?" I asked of Balser.

"My bullet must have struck the powder keg," he answered. "Perhaps the powder was ignited by friction, or a lighted piece of gun wad may have clung to the bullet. I'm sure I don't know how it happened; but without it, Solomon, at least, would by this time have been numbered with his fathers."

After we had killed the wounded wolves — I think there were eight of them — we stood in amazement, hardly able to believe that we were alive, when suddenly we were aroused by the corn song of Solomon. We went into the stable to feed him, and found that sagacious donkey as calm and quiet as if nothing at all unusual had occurred.

"How did you happen to think of kicking out the powder keg?" Balser asked of

Solomon, while he was giving him his corn. Solomon simply wagged his ears knowingly, as if to say: —

"Let me alone for thinking of the right thing at the right time, and doing it, too."

CHAPTER III

WYANDOTTE, THE INDIAN

One cold evening we were all sitting around the fire waiting for our story. Several suggestive hints had fallen from eager members of the audience. Mab had coaxingly lifted her chubby little hand to Uncle Tom Andy Bill's knee two or three times, but the curtain didn't rise. The old man sat smoking, and we were all very much afraid there would be no story that evening. All eyes were turned toward Mab for help, and soon she began to feel that the responsibility of the situation rested on her little shoulders, so she climbed into Uncle Tom's lap, put her arms around his neck, and whispered in his ear:—

"Please, please, Uncle Tom, tell us another story."

Then she slid down between his knees, resumed her rocking-chair by his side, caressingly took the favorite finger in her hand, and Uncle Tom Andy Bill was conquered.

THE STORY

I'm blest if I know what to give you to-night, but I believe I'll tell you about our first meeting with Wyandotte, the Indian. It was from him we had the hint of the wonderful Indian treasure that afterward led us into so much trouble. Our first meeting with him occurred five or six days before Balser and I had our terrific fight with three bears. I'll tell you about the fight, too, but as our meeting with Wyandotte occurred first, I will begin by telling you about him.

After Solomon's victory over the wolves (it was Solomon's victory, and we had little to do with the glorious affair), we led a peaceful life, and nothing occurred during ten days that would make even Mab's little toe cold, except the weather. My life! but it was cold, and Balser and I hugged the fire every night.

After Solomon kicked out the powder keg, we went home and bought another keg on credit, for we had taken enough pelts to pay for a great deal of powder.

We built a strong door to Solomon's stable, though we had no fear of another

attack from wolves. Those that escaped would tell other wolves of the sad catastrophe that befell their pack, and they, in turn, would tell others. The news would travel like wildfire throughout all wolf-land, and no temptation would induce a wolf that had heard of the explosion to visit the spot. This statement may seem to be overdrawn, but I have known a great many wolves in my day, and I am thoroughly convinced that they warn each other of danger. I don't ask any one else to believe it, but *I* believe it.

No animal is more anxious to take care of itself than a wolf. For caution, cunning, hunger, and general depravity, I place the wolf at the head of all four-footed animals. It has the start of some that walk on two legs, except, perhaps, in the matter of depravity. In that respect, of course, we'll have to give the palm to man.

Nevertheless, we barricaded Solomon's stable so strongly that he could have withstood a siege from all the wolves in Indiana, and the wise donkey fully appreciated our efforts for his protection.

We fortified our own house, too, and although the weather was terribly cold, we

soon became used to the freezing temperature, and I believe that never in my life was I happier or more contented than in our cabin on Brandywine. Every morning we visited our traps and hunted until late dinner-time; then we prepared the pelts, stretched them on thongs, and hung them up to cure. This kept us busy until supper-time.

Before eating we changed our buckskin coats and trousers for woollen clothes, scrubbed ourselves thoroughly with soap and water, for the odor of the pelts was anything but pleasant, and the rest of the evening belonged to us and to the fire.

Deer meat, rabbits, quail, wild turkeys, and pheasants, the product of our guns and traps, hung in plenty from the limbs of near-by trees, well out of reach of foxes and other prowlers, and the meat, being frozen, was kept sweet by the cold. When we were ready for supper, which was our one great meal, we went out to our forest pantry, selected the game we wanted on our bill of fare, and proceeded to cook it. We baked potatoes in the ashes, made sweet, yellow corn pone in our Dutch oven, broiled a juicy piece of venison, a rabbit, or a half-dozen

quails, and I tell you, we had a supper fit for a king.

After supper we sat on our stump chairs before the fire, cracking walnuts, hazelnuts, and hickory-nuts for dessert. We loved to hear the wind howling through the trees, and to hear the snow or sleet dashing against our roof, for we were cosey and warm before our big, talkative fire, and we knew that Solomon, half covered by his soft bed of hay, was snoring happily in his warm stable near by.

One day two hunters wandered by our cabin, and told us that Kaster's barn over on Blue had burned a week before. They said that an old Indian had been seen in the vicinity of the barn, and the sheriff of the county was hunting for him to arrest him for burning it. That evening, after supper, Balser and I were sitting before the fire. I was cracking nuts and Balser was trying to smoke tobacco in a pipe that he had whittled from a brier root. Oh! but he was sick—but that has nothing to do with the story.

"I don't believe Kaster's barn was burned by an Indian," said Balser. "There are a lot of white vagabonds loafing about Blue

River who are a great deal worse than the Indians."

"You're right, Balser," said I. "Some white folks hate the Indians, and seem to forget that God made them. If we would treat them right, they would not molest us. Our white trash steal from them, abuse them, and kill them; and when an Indian retaliates, we all grow righteously indignant and want to exterminate the whole race of red men. It's a shame, Balser. When a thief steals something, he does not cry, 'Stop thief!' but he screams, 'Indian! Indian!' If a white rascal has a grudge against his neighbor and burns the neighbor's barn, he immediately says he saw an Indian prowling about, and the sheriff and all the settlement turn out to hunt down the poor savage. Any Indian they find will serve their purpose and he is made to bear the sins of his white brother."

Several days passed. We had forgotten all about Kaster's barn, and thought nothing more about the wrongs of the Indian. The cold weather had begun to break, though it was still very cold. I especially remember one stormy day. We had taken several

beavers that day, and had been unusually successful with other game. The sun was going down as Balser and I were walking toward the cabin, after hanging the result of our day's work in Solomon's stable. The sky in the west was an angry, black red, and the wind blew in sullen, fitful gusts. Dark, threatening clouds flew rapidly overhead, as if bent on an errand of mischief, and the day seemed to be closing with a frown and a growl.

"We'll have rain before an hour," said Balser. "Then when the sun is down and the weather turns colder, look out for snow and sleet and a blizzard."

"We'll be comfortable anyway," said I, "and Solomon is snug and warm and happy."

"Yes," returned Balser, "but think of the deer, rabbits, quail, and the other poor wild creatures. How the poor things will suffer and die by the hundreds. I am sorry for all but the wolf. Many a tragedy will take place under the bare sweetbrier bush before morning, and in the spring, the bush will bloom as sweetly as if it had never seen the tragedy at all. May the Lord have pity on any poor human being who is out without shelter this night."

Balser was right. We had hardly carried in our wood for the night, when the rain began in a cold, freezing drizzle. Soon the wind rose in moaning waves, and dashed the rain upon our clapboard roof until it seemed to us that the lost souls of a past eternity were crying for comfort and help.

"Oh, what a night!" said Balser, holding his hands to the fire. "Rain in winter is as bad as fever in August. The wind will continue to rise, and then the rain will change to sleet and snow; but, as you say, we will be warm and asleep, and by morning the woods will look like a forest of crystal."

We ate our supper and sat before the fire later than usual, dreading to leave it, for our cabin was a much better protection against cold than against the wind. When we were ready for bed that night, we did not bank the coals, but rolled in a large hickory log, intending to replenish the fire during the night. We crept into our sleeping-bags, but did not go to sleep quickly. Soon the wind rose to a gale and we heard the sleet beating down on the roof. I could not resist looking out upon the storm, and I was rewarded by a view of the worst night I ever beheld. I was

glad enough to get back to my warm sleeping-bag, and Balser grumbled drowsily: —

"I hope you're satisfied now, Tom Andy Bill, and will go to sleep. Cæsar! how the wind does howl and the sleet beat down!"

We lay for a little time, shivering at the mere thought of conditions outside, but presently went to sleep and there was no storm for us.

We had no clock and could not tell the hour, but it must have been near midnight when I was awakened. I thought I heard a knock on the door. I started up and threw the bearskin hood back from my ears. All was silent, and I concluded that I had been dreaming. I was about to cover my head and go to sleep again when I distinctly heard another knock on the door, as if some one were pounding the boards with a club. I stretched out my hand and wakened Balser.

"Some one is knocking at the door," I whispered. He at once came out of his bag and took down his gun. I quickly followed his example, and waited for the knock to be repeated. Presently it came again.

"Who's there?" asked Balser.

"Let dead man in," came in moaning tones through the door.

The form of the request seemed so thoroughly in keeping with the night that we thought a ghost was demanding admittance. We were not afraid of bears and wolves, but no man lives who is not afraid of a ghost, even though he knows that no such thing exists. There is a point in every man's nature when reason cannot overtake the superstitions that were blood of his blood and bone of his bone when his ancestors were savages.

Balser and I were frightened; but when the answer came, I opened the door cautiously, while Balser stood with his gun at full cock, ready to kill the ghost should one attack us. In place of a ghost we found a poor, old, half-frozen Indian. He almost fell into our cabin. I caught him as he tottered and led him to the fire. His blanket was like a cloak of ice, his moccasins were hard as wooden shoes, his long, tangled hair was a mass of icicles, and the poor old fellow was almost dead.

We asked no questions, but proceeded to divest him of his frozen blanket and to make

him comfortable. We had several extra bearskins that were beautifully tanned and very soft and warm. We wrapped these about the Indian and placed him before the fire. He was almost unconscious, but when the frost was thawed out of him, consciousness returned, and he moaned out five words, "No eat since two days."

A few sweet potatoes and a piece of corn pone were left from supper. Balser brought these from the shelf and placed them before the Indian. He fell upon them like a famished wolf, but Balser allowed him to eat only a small portion. I took a dressed quail from a shelf and was about to hang it over the fire to broil, but the Indian snatched it from my hand and ate it raw, bones and all, before I had time to recover from my astonishment.

We built up the fire, and the Indian stretched himself out in front of it. He lay on the floor moaning, but soon after we had covered him with bearskins, he seemed to sleep, and we crept into our bags, though for a long time there was no sleep in our eyes. Dogs hate Indians, and Tige and Prince growled viciously at first. We silenced them with a switch, and before long they tolerated

the situation, though they were not at all satisfied with it.

Toward morning Balser and I slept, but we were soon awakened by the Indian, who was talking loudly in a strange incoherent mixture of Indian and English. We hurriedly got out of our sleeping-bags, and found our guest trying to rise to his feet. The poor fellow groaned and placed his hand on his breast as if in great pain. His hands, that had been so cold earlier in the night, were now burning hot, and we soon discovered that he was very ill with a fever. We induced him to lie down again, and tried to cover him with a soft bearskin, but he angrily tossed it off. A sick Indian on our hands was no trifling matter, though we were not sorry we had taken him in. We were glad. Soon we were very glad. I hold to the belief that everything of good a man does in this world returns to him in some form, and that every moment of suffering one unnecessarily brings upon another will, soon or late, fall back upon his own head.

All that day and the next night, the Indian tossed in a raging fever. Much of the time he talked in his delirium, and much that he

said was spoken in English. The evening after he arrived he was lying on a soft bed of hay that Balser had made for him in a corner of the cabin. We had finished supper and were cracking nuts for dessert. The weather had not improved and the blizzard was still raging, but we had piled on great armfuls of wood and the cabin was cosey, for the fire was doing its full and glorious duty. The Indian lay unconscious of blizzard or fire, muttering, talking, and silent by turns.

"What's your name?" asked Balser, addressing the Indian.

Balser spoke in jest and did not expect an answer, but to our surprise one came.

"Wyandotte," said the Indian, speaking as one who talks in his sleep.

"Where are you from?" asked Balser, pleased with the success of his first question.

Again came the word, "Wyandotte."

"Where are you going?"

"Wyandotte," answered the Indian.

"Why are you going there?" asked Balser.

"To get the gold, gold, gold."

At the time we attached no importance to his words, but Balser continued his catechism.

"What gold?" he asked.

The Indian made no reply. After a long pause, Balser laughingly asked: —

"Where is the gold?"

"In the home of Wyandotte Wyolyo," answered the Indian. Then he grew excited and spoke rapidly, but all that he said was uttered in the Indian language, which we did not understand sufficiently to catch his meaning, though we could partially understand an Indian when he spoke slowly.

The Indian was very sick for five days, and we nursed him carefully. At the end of that time the fever left him and he quickly recovered, but he was very weak, and we asked him to remain in our cabin until he was strong. I confess that our invitation was not given out of pure sympathy. We hoped to be able to make him talk of the treasure, but we knew that we would have to go about it cautiously, for an Indian is by nature extremely wary and very suspicious.

We, of course, had little faith in the theory that the gold of which Wyandotte had spoken was anything more than a golden dream, but his words had put the dream into our heads, and while we did not expect to

gain anything from Wyandotte, it would cost us nothing to keep him, and there might be more truth in the words uttered in his delirium than we supposed. Therefore we were very kind to Wyandotte, partly because we were sorry for him and liked the old fellow, but chiefly because the gold bug had got into our bonnets, and we hoped that the dream might, by some wonderful stroke of fortune, become a glorious reality.

Two weeks after the Indian had come to our cabin, a deputy sheriff of the county rode up to our door. Balser and I were stretching pelts outside the cabin, and Wyandotte was lying inside before the fire. We were standing near the door, which was open, and the Indian heard all that was said.

"Hello, boys," said the deputy sheriff. "Did you hear about Kaster's barn burning?"

"Yes, we heard about it," I answered. I knew the sheriff was hunting the Indian who was supposed to have burned the barn, and I knew he would take Wyandotte if he saw him, so I stepped to the door and partly closed it.

"An Indian burned it," said the deputy sheriff. "I heard there was one up this way. Have you seen a redskin prowling about here?"

Balser, who was always quick with an answer, said: —

"No, we haven't seen an Indian prowling about here."

You notice he did not say he had not seen an Indian. He said he had not seen one prowling about, and he told the truth, for the Indian had not been out of the cabin. We wanted to save Wyandotte, because we did not believe he had burned Kaster's barn; but we also wanted to win his gratitude, for the magic word "gold" was ringing in our ears, and we hoped to coax the secret from him if he had one.

The deputy rode away and we went into the cabin.

"Did you hear what the deputy sheriff said?" asked Balser.

"I hear. He want me. I no burn barn," answered Wyandotte.

"I don't believe you burned the barn," I said; "and if I can save you from the clutches of these fellows, I mean to do it."

A long pause ensued, and Wyandotte said:—

"Indian remember, too. What you call?" He meant to say, "What is your name?"

"My name is Tom Andy Bill Addison," I answered, "and this boy's name is Balser Brent."

"Tomandybilladdison," repeated the Indian, going over the name many times and pronouncing it as one word. He remained silent for a long time, as if he were thinking, and then spoke slowly, hesitatingly: "I remember, too; remember long time. Indian's memory for good comes again and again like the rains in the spring, and his memory for bad comes like the lightning, not often, but sure to kill. Tomandybilladdison and Balserbrent been good to Indian. Indian sure to remember. Maybe some long day he pay back again — in gold, maybe."

"What is your name?" asked Balser.

"Maybe Wyandotte; maybe some other name; not know, only maybe."

"Where is Wyandotte?" asked Balser.

"Here," replied the Indian, pointing to the spot on which he stood.

"But where is the place that you call the

home of Wyandotte Wyolyo? You spoke of it the other night when you were sick," said Balser.

"Oh, that sick talk. Sick Indian got no sense."

We did not agree with him, but we pushed the matter no further, knowing that our questions would put him on his guard.

CHAPTER IV

A BEAR FIGHT IN A SNOWDRIFT

A DAY or two after the conversation with Wyandotte, Balser and I had our fight with the three bears, and this was how it came about.

We rose early one morning, and I went out to feed and water Solomon. When I took him to the creek where we had cut a hole in the ice for him to drink, I noticed bear tracks in the snow on the bank near the water hole, from which a bear evidently had been drinking. When I had taken Solomon back to the stable, I went to the cabin and asked Wyandotte to go with me to the water hole and give me his opinion about the age of the bear tracks, although I was sure they had not been there the night before. The Indian went with me, and after closely examining the tracks, he said: —

"Ugh! Big bear! Heap big bear! Wounded — lame in one leg — hind leg."

How the Indian obtained all his information from the half-blurred tracks, I don't know, but he seemed sure of what he said, and I unhesitatingly believed him. If we could kill this bear, it would be a stroke of great good luck for us. Its skin would be worth ten shillings and its meat would not only furnish us food for the dogs, but would surely bring us five dollars at the town of Blue River.

We had seen but one bear since the cold weather began. These curious animals eat ravenously in the summer and fall, and grow fat. When the very cold weather comes on, they seem to be aware of its approach, so they seek a cave or a hollow tree and go to sleep until pleasant weather returns. Frequently, when they cannot find a cave or a hollow tree, they go to sleep under a cliff where the snow is apt to drift, and there they hibernate for a time beneath the snow.

In very cold countries, bears sometimes sleep for four months; but our winters are comparatively short, and two weeks is a long hibernating period in this climate. While this sleep lasts the bear lives on its fat, accumulated during the feeding season. We had

not expected to find a bear prowling about, and the tracks were a most welcome surprise. This one probably had been disturbed in its dreams.

We lost no time in eating breakfast, you may be sure; and when we had finished, we looked carefully to our guns, bullets, and powder-horns, gave our knives a keen edge on the whetstone, and started on the trail of the bear. Tige and Prince were delighted and danced about us in great glee. They seemed to know that something besides mink and muskrat was in the wind. When we took up the trail, Wyandotte wanted to go with us; but he was not strong, and we told him to stay at home to watch the cabin and stretch a lot of pelts that we had left uncared for over night.

We easily followed the tracks over a route that wound in all directions through the woods, but we did not so easily overtake the bear. By noon we were hungry and pretty tired, for it is hard work walking through snow over which a thin crust of ice has been frozen. We had taken our dinner with us, and shortly after noon we rested and ate. Of course Tige and Prince got nothing to

eat, although they danced about us and begged eagerly for just one little mouthful. They gave us to understand distinctly that they were very hungry, and with water streaming from their mouths, they watched every bite we took. It was cruel not to feed them, for we had given them no breakfast; but if we satisfied their hunger, they would not only become lazy, but their sense of smell would become less keen and they would be of no use to us in spooring.

If we should find the bear or should give up trying to find it, Tige and Prince would get their suppers at once. We hoped to feed them on bear meat, but if we failed in that, we would kill a rabbit for them.

Frequently the dogs were tempted to chase a rabbit and secure their own dinner, but they knew if they even so much as barked at a rabbit, they would receive a terrible thrashing; so the faithful friends went hungry for our sake, and that was more than we would have done for them.

Balser and I were very hungry, so we ate all our dinner and saved nothing for the poor dogs nor for ourselves later on. The Indians have a saying, "The man who eats

all he has at one meal may eat nothing at the next." Balser and I were sorry that evening that we had been so greedy at noon, for we were very hungry before we had another meal, as you shall hear. After dinner we again took up the spoor, and the dogs, who understood that their dinner depended upon finding the bear, gave us a rapid lead.

This adventure happened early in January when the days were short, and Balser and I were so intent on our pursuit that we did not notice the sun until it was almost down. We had lost the tracks an hour earlier.

"We'd better be turning for home, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser. "It will soon be dark, and when the light gives out we can't see our tracks home."

"Right you are," I answered, a feeling of uneasiness suddenly coming over me. "I'm blest if I know where we are."

"Neither do I," answered Balser; "but if we start at once, we can follow our tracks until dark, and then we'll have to make the rest of our way home as best we can."

While we stood debating the situation, we heard Tige and Prince barking furiously

quite a distance ahead of us. The dogs had been running rapidly, and we could not see them; but we knew they were just beyond a small hill that stood three hundred yards ahead of us, a short distance to the right.

The barking of the dogs drove all thoughts of home-going out of our heads, and we hurried forward, hoping that the bear was at bay. After we had turned the bend around the base of the hill — we did not go over it — we saw Tige and Prince barking furiously at nothing. When we came up to them, they were standing at the foot of the hill barking toward it, but we could not see even a rabbit track. In front of the dogs there was apparently nothing but a smooth, snow-covered hillside, ten or twelve feet high.

We stood watching the dogs, and soon Balser said, "Tige, you're a fool;" but Tige seemed to answer back, "I'm not a fool."

The dogs continued to bark furiously. Their hair rose angrily and they faced the snow-covered hillside so persistently, that we thought surely they had gone crazy from hunger. But it often happens that when we don't understand other men — and dogs — we call them crazy. Everything great that

has been accomplished has been done by crazy men, if the ignorant people who have lived about them are to be believed. Men said Galileo was crazy because he declared the earth was round and revolved about the sun. All the world thought Columbus was crazy when he insisted that he could sail westward and reach the land of the East. Even the English Parliament thought Stephenson was crazy when he said that the steam locomotive and the railroads could accomplish all he claimed. Morse was crazy, many persons said, when he announced that he could send a message a thousand miles in a few seconds. The truth is, a fool thinks every man but himself insane. Balser and I were fools to think that our dogs were crazy. We were so vain, we could not believe that they knew better than we did what they were about. I soon grew disgusted watching the apparently foolish dogs barking at the white hillside, and said: —

"Come, Balser, let us start home. These fool dogs will keep us here for a week if we listen to them. The sun will be down in half an hour, and in an hour it will be dark. I'm cold and hungry and I'm going home."

"All right, I'm with you," answered Balser; so we fastened the gun straps to our guns, slung them over our shoulders, and started home.

When the dogs saw us going, they loudly protested. They said as plainly as if they were speaking English, "Don't go, you fools, don't go." Of course it was very insolent in our dogs to call us fools, but after all they were right. We did not heed them and continued to retrace our steps. The dogs refused to follow us, and after we had gone a little way, Balser whistled for them. They were well-trained animals and always responded instantly to their master's call; but on this occasion they paid no attention to it, and we could hear their voices coming faintly to us from the other side of the little hill, which was now quite a distance behind us. Balser whistled again and again. Still the dogs barked, but did not come in response to the call.

"If I have to go back for those crazy dogs, I'll take a switch and lay it on till they'll remember," said Balser. He waited for a little time and said: "Hold my gun, Tom Andy Bill. I'll cut a switch and teach those fellows a lesson of obedience."

Balser broke a switch from a bush and started back to fetch the dogs. After he left me I began to wonder if by any chance we could be wrong and the dogs right. I had the guns, so I hurriedly followed Balser, and we turned the base of the hill together.

The dogs were still barking at the snow-covered hillside. Nothing but the smooth snow was visible. Balser, with his switch lifted ready to strike, was almost up to the dogs, when Tige — I believe he was the smartest dog that ever lived — began to dig furiously into the snow. Then Prince, who was also a sensible dog, though always playing "second fiddle" to Tige, began to make the snow fly.

The dogs howled and whined in their efforts to tell us something that was on their minds, but we did not have sense enough to know what they were saying. We sometimes get angry at dumb brutes because they do not understand what we say to them, but we don't appreciate our own dumbness in failing to understand what they say to us. They understand us much better than we understand them, and none but a cruel man will beat them because of an ignorance which is

less than his own. But the dogs said so much and said it so plainly that we began to understand them.

"By Jove, Tom Andy Bill, this is not a hillside. It's a great snowdrift," said Balser. "The snow must be five or six feet deep in there."

He threw away his switch, and we watched the dogs burrowing into the drift. They dug rapidly. Soon their heads disappeared in the tunnel they were making, then their bodies, and by and by nothing was visible but the tips of their tails. They understood the art of tunnel-making. They broke the snow with their front feet and threw it back; then they stood on their front feet and with their hind feet sent the snow flying out through the mouth of the tunnel behind them.

Balser and I supposed that the dogs would find a frozen covey of quails, or perhaps a fox; but we let them have their own way, since they seemed determined on it, and watched the process of tunnel-building with ever increasing interest.

As the dogs burrowed into the drift they continued barking, and their voices came to

us in muffled howls and whines from beneath the snow. While we were watching the white hillside, it suddenly rose in a little mountain of snow, as if by a volcanic upheaval. I confess that I was frightened to see the apparently solid earth acting in such an unusual manner.

"Give me my gun, quick, quick!" cried Balser. "Don't you know what it is?"

I handed him his gun, still watching the heaving hillside with a curiosity that bordered on timidity.

"There's a bear under the snow," cried Balser, "and he'll kill the dogs if we don't help them. They can't fight under there in such close quarters; and if there's a bear there, it will claw them to pieces in no time."

Balser bravely waded into the snowdrift toward the upheaval, and I followed close by his side. Suddenly my foot touched something soft. Immediately another upheaval took place, and I was a part of it. I felt myself lifted into the air and then I felt myself go down backward, head first into the snow. As I fell I saw Balser taking part in another upheaval not six feet from me. I shall never forget the comical expression

of surprise on his face, and although I was frightened almost out of my wits, I could not help laughing as I went under the snow. I scrambled out pretty quickly, and as I was brushing the snow from my face, Balser also came up from the white depths. We had lost our hats, and our guns were somewhere at the bottom of the snow.

"By George," said Balser, sputtering and blowing and rubbing the snow from his face, "I believe there's a nest of bears in there! Let's get our guns."

We waded back after our guns, and while I was feeling about under the snow for mine, a bear that seemed to be about two sizes larger than a mule rose right out of the drift not two feet in front of me, and shook himself. I left my gun where it was. You see I didn't want it as badly as I had thought I did.

The snowdrift where I had fallen was breast deep, and I could not make a rapid retreat, though I tried as hard as I ever tried in my life. I was very busy, but I had time to glance toward Balser, and saw, standing in front of him, another monster bear that had just risen from the snow. At the same

instant there was an upheaval of snow between us, and a third bear showed himself, apparently ready for fight.

This all happened in a few seconds. I tried to go backward, but stepped on one of the dogs and fell. As I went under the snow, my bear came down on top of me, and I thought my day had come. The dogs were under the snow and, of course, could help neither me nor themselves. I, too, was completely under the snow, but worse still I was under the bear, and it seemed to weigh a ton. I expected every instant to feel its great horny claws in my flesh, or to have my bones crushed between its fearful jaws, but to my surprise nothing of the kind happened. I could not move, and I concluded the bear was trying to smother me to death.

After a long time — it seemed long to me, but it could not have been many seconds — I heard one of the dogs growling near my head. Then I felt the bear trying to rise. I crawled from under him as quickly as possible and made the effort of my life to get away. I succeeded, and when I gained my feet, there stood two of the bears rubbing their eyes, but

there was no Balser, no dogs, and no third bear. I concluded that Balser and the third bear were engaged in a death struggle under the snow, so I hurried to the spot where Balser had disappeared.

Just as I started, Balser rose from the snow and his bear quickly rose beside him. Balser held his long knife in his hand and was covered with blood. There *had* been a death struggle under the snow, sure enough. I thought Balser was killed. I helped him out of the drift and anxiously inquired if he was hurt.

"I don't know," he answered, "but the bear is hurt. Look out for him."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the wounded bear came towards us. Balser, knife in hand, looked like the incarnation of rage. Instead of running from the bear he ran toward it, and the fight that had begun under the drift was finished above the snow. Balser struck the bear with his long knife just back of the shoulder; then he sprang behind the brute and struck it again and again. The dogs, having extricated themselves, came to his aid, and I then entered the combat. Four against one did not

seem fair, especially as the bear was hardly awake, but "needs must when Old Nick drives," and so we killed the bear.

The other two bears were still standing upright in the snowdrift, rubbing their sleepy eyes. Poor brutes! We had disturbed their rest, and they could not get their eyes open.

Balser, who was the bravest boy I ever knew, hurried back into the drift, dived beneath the snow, got his gun right from under one of the bears, and came quickly back to me.

I, ashamed to be behind Balser in bravery, essayed the same daring feat; but when I got my gun and rose to my feet, the bear evinced a sudden, unexpected affection for me, and in less time than I can tell it, had me in its great hairy arms. It gave me one mighty hug, and I thought another squeeze like that would finish Tom Andy Bill. But before the other hug came, I heard the report of a gun close behind me. I also heard a bullet strike the bear's head within five inches of my nose. A little splash of blood struck me in the face. I felt the bear's hold relax, and the brute and I went under the snow together for the second time.

I must have lost consciousness for a minute

or two, for the next thing I remember was Balser dragging me from under the dead bear. When he helped me out of the drift, we were a pair of beauties. Balser, covered with blood, looked like a demon. My face was scratched and cut in twenty places, and every bone and muscle in my body ached.

I looked at Balser and he looked at me, and though neither of us knew how badly we were hurt, we could not help laughing, though, to tell you the truth, we wanted to cry.

"There goes the other bear!" I cried, pointing to the retreating form of the third sleeper.

"I don't care," answered Balser; "I wouldn't go after him if he had a hundred hides. I know when I have enough. Let's invoice."

We sat down in the snow and examined our wounds as well as we could.

"I believe that every rib is broken," said I.

"I wonder if all this blood is mine," mused Balser.

Cold as it was, we took off his clothing, but we found no wounds save a few scratches on his face and neck; so we concluded that the gore had been contributed by the bear.

Balser examined my ribs and pronounced them all whole, though I insisted that every one of them was broken from my spine.

"We'll get stiff if we sit here," said Balser. "Let us start home."

"We had better cover the bears with snow to protect the carcasses from the wolves and foxes," I suggested.

"You may cover them if you wish," he answered, starting away. "I wouldn't stay to cover a chest of gold. I'd even leave Wyandotte's treasure. I want to get home."

We did, however, remain long enough to cut a good piece of bear meat for the dogs; and when our faithful friends had swallowed it, we covered the bears with snow and started for home. Darkness soon fell, and in less than a half-hour we were lost in the deep forest.

"I am sleepy," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill, "and I am going to bed." A chorus of protests went up from the audience.

"Tell us if you got home," said one.

"Oh, please don't stop while you're lost in the woods," said another.

But Uncle Tom Andy Bill said: "I'll tell

you all about it to-morrow evening, if I don't go to church."

Mab climbed to his knees, put her arms about his neck, and whispered excitedly: —

"Please tell me, Uncle Tom Andy Bill, if you got home alive. If you died in the woods that night, I'll die too."

He kissed her curls and said: —

"Of course I didn't die, sweetheart. Don't you see I'm here? But I'm tired and don't want to talk any more."

So Mab climbed down from his knees and led him by the finger off to slumber land.

CHAPTER V

LOST IN THE WOODS

NEXT evening there was an eager audience awaiting Tom Andy Bill. He lighted his pipe, and Mab drew her chair close beside him, to be within easy reach of the big, helping finger at the "scary" places.

"Let's pretend that maybe you and Balser didn't get home," said Mab, snuggling up to her friend; but after a pause she continued: "No, we'll not pretend that you didn't get home; that makes me want to cry. We'll pretend that we don't know whether Balser got home or not. Then it will be more scary, and make us feel nice and shivery."

"All right," answered Tom Andy Bill; "maybe Balser didn't get home. Perhaps there will be no pretending."

"Oh, Uncle Tom! No, no! I can't stand that either! Please tell me that Balser did get home," pleaded Mab, a flood of tears almost ready to spring from her eyes.

"Yes, yes, sweetheart," said Tom Andy Bill, caressingly; "we both got home, but we had an awful night of it."

"Oh, not too awful. Please don't make it too awful, Uncle Tom, or I'll just shiver — just shiver to death."

Every one laughed except Uncle Tom Andy Bill. He never laughed when Mab was serious.

"I'll have to tell you about it as it happened," he said. "I don't make up the stories — couldn't do it to save my life."

"Oh, well, you are here, anyway. Let me hold your hand. Then when we come to the very bad places, I'll always know you are safe."

The love in Mab's little heart was dearer to Uncle Tom Andy Bill than the blood in his own. The baby girl reached up, grasped one of the big fingers, and said: —

"All right. Now go ahead." And Uncle Tom Andy Bill began.

THE STORY

I tell you, there are only two creatures in the world that it does not pay to befriend — a snake and a fool. Even a snake may some-

times be grateful, but a fool, never. Balser and I befriended the Indian, and we had our reward sooner than we expected. I never saw an Indian that was entirely a fool; that distinction is left for the white man.

When Balser and I discovered that we were lost, we stopped. I looked about in the heavens, and thought I saw the North Star. I knew our general direction in pursuing the bear had been northeast, therefore we would take a southwesterly course in returning. We were not at all sure of our route, so we walked slowly; but soon we came to the banks of a stream that we thought was Blue River, and we at once knew we were going wrong.

"If we go down the river," said Balser, "we ought to reach Kaster's house in an hour or two at least, and we can get shelter. I don't want to stay out all night with my scratches and wounds."

"All right," said I, and we started, as we thought, down the stream towards Kaster's.

The dogs, too, were lost, and clung timidly to our heels. Perhaps if we had been as wise as they, we should have been able to find our way home. The snow soon began

to fall about us like a deluge of feathers, and after we had been walking rapidly for an hour, Balser said: —

"I surely know the river five miles above Kaster's, and it doesn't look familiar to me here. I do believe we have been going upstream instead of down."

I didn't know which direction we had taken. I was so confused that I believe I should not have known my own house if I had been standing on the doorstep.

"Take me home, Tige," said I, stooping and patting the dog's head, "and never let me leave it again."

Tige struck my leg with his tail to let me know he was wagging it, and the poor dog seemed to say: "Don't be frightened, Tom Andy Bill. We'll get home by and by."

We stood in utter confusion for a while, and Balser, pointing westward — as we supposed — from the river, said: —

"I believe that direction is west. We are on the west side of some stream, for we came eastward and we did not cross a river or a creek."

The reasoning seemed good, and we, feeling that we had our bearings once more,

started as we supposed in a southwesterly direction for home. Soon after we started we again entered the deep forest and were as badly lost as ever. We, however, kept on walking to keep our blood circulating, for while the weather was not very cold, it was raw, and what little wind there was seemed to penetrate to our very bones. Although we walked rapidly, we could not keep warm.

We were moving along aimlessly and hopelessly through a very dark portion of the forest when a large black animal crossed my path not one foot in front of me, and took with it in its teeth a piece of my half-rotten buckskin trousers. It was a wolf, and you may be sure I sprang back pretty badly frightened.

"He will go and tell his friends," said Balser, "and they will come and take revenge on us for Solomon's powder keg."

Hardly had he spoken when we heard the barking howl of wolves coming from the direction the wolf had taken. Wolves are cowardly beasts, and we had no fear of two or three, but a hungry pack is the greatest danger man or beast can encounter. Especially is the danger great at night. Judging by the noise the wolves made, we would have

been justified in believing that a great pack was on our scent; but we also knew that two or three wolves could exert themselves to make as much noise as twenty. That is a shrewd trick to which they sometimes resort for the purpose of terrifying their prey and making it easier to capture.

Balser and I, with the dogs close at our heels, hurried forward as fast as we could travel, though our haste would not help us against the wolves. If the pack were a large one, they would soon overtake us. If the raw, cold night air chilled our blood, the fear of the wolves chilled our very bones and gave speed to our heels.

Thus we were hurrying along, looking constantly to the right and to the left and back of us, when suddenly Balser stumbled over an obstruction in his path and fell forward on his face. We were both frightened, but when he rose to his feet, he stooped and thrust his hand under the snow to discover, if possible, the cause of his fall.

"By George, it's a bear!" he cried, springing back. I, too, sprang back. We had no fight left in us. We had had more than enough fighting for one day.

As we retreated, we expected the bear to arise up and make its presence known, but it did not. I was watching the spot closely and was not paying much attention to where I was going, so I moved backward against an obstruction of some sort, and fell over it. When I examined my stumbling-block, I found that it was another bear.

"A bear! Another bear!" I cried, springing to my feet and joining Balser in a general stampede for safety.

"Lord, did you ever hear of so many bears?" wailed Balser. "The woods fairly swarm with them. Five in one day; and wolves! Hear them, Tom Andy Bill, hear them! I believe I'm going crazy — frightened out of my wits!"

After a minute or two of trembling silence I said: —

"I'll bet those are logs that we stumbled over."

As the supposed bears did not move, we laughed nervously and went cautiously back to them. I put my hand on the one Balser had fallen over, but I sprang away very quickly, crying, "It's a bear, sure enough!" Then I went to the one I had stumbled over.

I sprang away from it, too, with the exclamation, "A bear!"

I quickly joined Balser at a little distance, and we waited somewhat anxiously for developments. Presently he said, laughing nervously:—

"Say, Tom Andy Bill, do you know where we are? Those bears are dead, and this is where we had our fight in the snowdrift."

"Don't say a word," said I, sitting down on the bear nearest to me. "We are right back to the place we started from. I think the spot has a charm to hold us. Listen to the wolves. I do believe we'll never get away from here alive, Balser."

The howling wolf pack came nearer and nearer, and our hearts sank lower and lower. When the wolves seemed to be getting too bold, we fired our guns and shouted to frighten them off. We had discharged five or six loads of powder when we heard, as if in response to our volley, a rolling Indian warwhoop.

"Great Jupiter! Indians!" cried Balser.

"I prefer Indians to wolves," said I; "let us fire again."

I loaded my gun heavily and fired. A rifle does not make a loud report, but we heard an answering warwhoop in response to my shot. We shouted at intervals of ten or twelve seconds, and soon we saw an Indian approaching. It was Wyandotte.

"Oh, Wyandotte," cried Balser, going to meet him, "we are glad to see you. We are lost."

"Indian know," answered Wyandotte. "This way home. Hurry. Heap rain by and by."

Wyandotte started home, and we gladly followed. We tried to make the Indian talk, and although his words were few, we succeeded in learning that he suspected we were lost when we did not return at night-fall, and started out to find us and to lead us home. How he was able to see our tracks in the dark without a torch, I don't understand; but he found us and took us home straight as a crow would fly.

After two hours' hard walking we reached the cabin near midnight. The snow had turned to rain, but just as we got home the wind shifted to the north and the rain turned to sleet. Had not our silent friend found us,

we certainly should have perished that night in the woods. We had nursed Wyandotte back to life, and he had repaid us in the same coin, so the obligation, much to our regret, was cancelled.

We were welcomed by a corn song from Solomon. He was almost famished, and, of course, got his hay and corn at once. We, too, were hungry all the way down to our toes, and our first task was to prepare supper. We did not wait for potatoes to bake, but made a great cake of corn pone, broiled several quails and two rabbits, and the three of us ate them all. I believe we could have eaten a dozen rabbits. Wyandotte ate a quail and prepared to go to sleep. Before he turned in, he said: —

"You help Indian. Indian pay back. Indian go away to-night."

We asked him to remain and help us bring home the bears we had killed.

"If you will stay," said Balser, "Tom Andy Bill and I will take the bearskins and the meat down to Blue River and sell them. You shall have all we get for them, and we will buy you a new pair of shoes and a new blanket."

Wyandotte shook his head. He would not stay.

"We'll get you a hatchet, too," said I.

No. Wyandotte must be going.

"We'll give you shoes, blanket, hatchet, knife, and gun if you'll stay with us three days," said Balser.

"Oh, cheap gun," said Wyandotte, contemptuously.

Balser and I each had two guns. I took down one of mine; it was a good English rifle.

"Is this gun cheap?" I asked.

"Good gun," answered Wyandotte.

"We'll give it to you," I said.

"Powder? Bullets?" the Indian asked.

"Yes," answered Balser.

"How much powder?" asked Wyandotte.

"A big horn full," I answered.

A big horn was the horn of an ox; a small horn was that of a cow.

"How big bullets?" asked the Indian, meaning how many.

"Two hands, two feet; two more hands, two more feet," said Balser, meaning forty.

In dealing with Indians, calculations were often made on the basis of the number of

fingers and toes possessed by a man. The number belonging to the person making the offer was usually recognized as the standard. If he was so fortunate as to be short of a few toes or fingers, the advantage in the trade was with him.

"Let Indian see toes," said Wyandotte, more from a habit of caution than because he suspected us of a desire to cheat him. Balser showed him five toes on each foot, and held out his fingers for inspection. The Indian, being satisfied, answered, "Stay three days."

Then he lay down on his bed of hay. Balser and I crept into our sleeping-bags, and being very tired, were soon in dreamland.

Next morning Solomon's corn song awakened us from a sound sleep. We did not want to get up, but having a big day's work ahead of us, we turned out, fed Solomon, and got our breakfast in a great hurry. We made a hasty visit to our traps, returned as quickly as possible, harnessed Solomon to the sled, and started with Wyandotte to fetch the dead bears. By noon we had loaded them on the sled and, amid vigorous protests from Solomon, started home. By five o'clock that evening the bears were

skinned, and the edible portion of the meat was hanging safely in the treetops. On the following day Balser and I took the meat and the skins to the town of Blue River. We got Wyandotte's blanket, knife, and hatchet, and had five shillings left to pay us for three days' hard work.

We slept at Balser's home that night, and started next morning for the cabin loaded with eggs, butter, a great can of sweet milk, and enough mince pies to make twenty boys sick for a month.

Solomon, with his accustomed good nature, seemed glad to return to Brandywine, and three hours after sun-up we were back in our cabin. Balser's mother gave us a bottle of whiskey with wild cherry bark. It was considered a great medicine among the settlers, and Mrs. Brent admonished us to take a little whenever we got our feet wet or became thoroughly chilled. I'll tell you more about the whiskey in a moment.

When we reached the cabin we gave Wyandotte his blanket, hatchet, knife, shoes, and gun. By way of good measure we also gave him three pairs of woollen socks, but these he tossed back to us, saying,

"Woman's gear." The other things he accepted stoically, without comment, and placed them on his bed next the wall.

After supper, Balser, having no thought of Wyandotte, took the whiskey bottle from his pocket and placed it on a shelf. I noticed the Indian's eyes glisten for a moment, but his face immediately became expressionless, and I thought no more about the glitter in his eyes. I knew that all Indians have a great love for intoxicants, but it did not occur to me that Wyandotte would want the whiskey until I happened to turn my face from the fire and saw him taking the bottle down from the shelf.

"Put that back!" I said, rising and going toward him. He held his hatchet in his hand and lifted it threateningly above my head.

"Ugh!" he grunted, "sit down!"

I sat down. Balser arose to remonstrate with our guest, for a drunken Indian usually is a fiend incarnate; but Wyandotte again lifted his hatchet and Balser sat down.

The Indian drained the bottle without taking it from his lips — fortunately it was not a large one — and came around in front of the fire, where he sat down upon the floor.

In a few minutes Wyandotte the Silent, as we often called him, began to chant in a low minor key. The words of his song were Indian, but frequently we caught the name "Wyandotte." The magic word always aroused our interest, for if the Indian had spoken the truth during his delirium, the gold was hidden at or in some place bearing that name.

We longed to know where Wyandotte was situated. We constantly discussed the subject when alone, and I believe we thought of nothing else. Therefore, when the Indian began to chant, we listened attentively, and soon Wyandotte the Silent became Wyandotte the Talkative. Under the influence of whiskey most Indians grow morose and sullen, but this one became cheerful and happy. His good humor grew apace, and presently I said:—

"Tell us about Wyandotte."

I'll not attempt to give you the language in which he spoke, but I'll try to give you the story in my own way, perhaps with a touch here and there of his figurative manner of speech.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORY OF BLUE VIOLET

THE Indian remained silent for a few minutes, gazing into the fire, then began: —

Wyandotte is the name of a small tribe of good Indians that used to live far, far from here, on the banks of a great river. They are all gone now, and are scattered like the leaves of autumn. Wyandotte Wyolyo is a great Indian god who loved his people as the eagle loves its young. Wyandotte is his home. It is a great cave — one moon, two moon, three moon journey from here.

Great hills surround the cave, and wolves whose numbers are as the pebbles of the river guard its door. Two devils with fiery breath stand inside the doorway to consume any one unlawfully trying to enter; but if one who has no good right to enter should succeed in passing beyond the portals of the cave, death would overtake him before he

could return to the sunlight. There are many rooms and passageways, and one who does not know the key to the labyrinth of the cave would be lost in the recesses of its stony heart and would perish miserably. Hanging from the roof of the cave and springing from its floor are white devils, some of them two, four, ten times bigger than a man, and these devils laugh at those who are lost in their midst and drive them mad.

Many, many moons ago — so many that their number is like the trees of a great forest, aye, like the leaves of the trees in spring — there lived not far from this marvellous cave a tribe of Indians calling themselves Wyandottes. For many years they did not know of the cave, for it was hidden amidst bare and rocky hills, and they did not climb those hills because their god, Wyandotte Wyolyo, lived among them, and the place of his home was sacred to them.

Long, long ago, one spring when the deer were bringing forth their young, and the leaves of the forest were bursting into bud, a tribe of people whose faces bore the color of the white, poor ground whereon maize

will not grow, came down the great river on which the Wyandottes lived, built their houses, and planted their crops on the rich black ground near the river's bank.

Summers came and went, and the white-faced tribe swarmed into the home of the Wyandottes always with increasing numbers. The new tribe stole from the Wyandottes their richest ground, whereon to grow their own maize and tobacco. If the Wyandottes complained, the whites fell upon them and beat them, and killed them with magic rods that breathed forth fire and death. The white tribe stole not only the home of the Wyandottes and the rich fields their fathers had cultivated, but the new people killed the game of the forest and what they did not kill they drove from the land with the thunder of their arms.

Of all the peoples of the earth, the Wyandotte maidens were the most beautiful. Their great eyes were as tender as the mother doe's, and sparkled like the stars in the blue-black sky on a moonless night. Their faces were like the fair full moon, and to look upon them brought joy to their husbands in time of trouble. Their natures were

like the balmy spring, and their breath was like the south wind, sighing through the forest when the sweet haw blooms. The Great Father loved the Wyandottes, and he said in the beginning: —

"I will give to this tribe the most beautiful maidens of all the earth, to make glad and strong the hearts of the braves."

I was of that tribe, and my heart is sore for the sake of my scattered people.

When the men of the white tribe saw our beautiful maidens, they coveted them and coaxed them from us. When the maidens could not be coaxed, the white men stole them, kept them for a time, and killed them with hardship and blows.

Once upon a time, so many summers ago that I have lost the count, there lived among the Wyandottes a young man who was called by his friends "Monyomo," which means in the language of the whites, "The Big Man who Talks Little." Monyomo, when still young, was a brave hunter. He feared neither man nor beast, loved his god, was a true son to his father, and gave to each man his due, whether it were of good or evil. I will not speak of his virtues, for the man who

sings the song of his own praise will find that none but fools take up the refrain. I was Monyomo, but Monyomo died of grief, and now Wyandotte lives in his place.

When Monyomo grew to manhood, his friends told him to take a wife, for, said they, "a wife is to a man what the sun and the rains of spring are to the maize." But among all the beautiful Wyandotte maidens there was none he wanted save a little maiden of tender years named "Ionwah," which means "Blue Violet." She was too young to be a wife, but Monyomo looked upon her and loved her, and said he would wait.

One cold winter, when the earth was white and the trees were black, the old chief of the Wyandottes died, and Monyomo was chosen to rule the tribe. Then he took Blue Violet to his wigwam that she might grow up to love him and be his wife when the cloak of womanhood should fall upon her.

In those times the hearts of the Wyandottes were sad, for the white people continued to pour in upon their hunting-ground and were growing more insolent and more oppressive year by year. Often we coun-

selled together to learn from our wise men a plan whereby we might stem the swift torrent of destruction that was rushing down upon our people. The young men desired war; but the old men said to wait the wait of a just cause, and that Wyandotte Wyolyo, the god of our tribe, would bring us help all in his own good time.

My heart longed for war, but my head told me that this terrible tribe that had come upon us like a cloud of locusts to steal our homes, would gladly rob us of our lives, and would take our young women to work for them as slaves.

Monyomo cared not for his life, though the future was rosy with the hue of a spring sunrise, and he wanted to live to hold Blue Violet to his heart as wife, and to see his child upon her breast. He had not suffered from the depredations of the whites save in the suffering of his tribe. Many of those who spoke for war had been maimed and beaten by the whites. Others had lost their sweethearts, wives, and children. All such longed for war, and were glad to welcome death for the sake of a just revenge.

It is much easier for a man to be wise and

prudent in the face of injury to others than it is to think twice if he himself has been wronged. Monyomo had not felt the hand of the white man; therefore, he, as chief, found it easy to decide with the old men, and the tribe did not then go to war.

Two springs, two summers, and two winters came and passed like the flight of a bird over our heads. The third spring had sent its welcome messengers of wild flowers, and the leaves of the trees were eager to drink the sun.

The rarest flower to bloom that spring was Blue Violet, and Monyomo told his tribe that he would pluck the beautiful blossom at the next new moon, and would wear it on his heart.

Upon the day before the sharp-horned moon was due, Monyomo went forth to kill a deer for his wedding feast. It was a bright, warm day, such as gladdens the hearts of the wild flowers; but it was the blackest day of Monyomo's life.

Before the sun had started down the hill of the sky, Monyomo had killed a rare, fat buck and, with his trophy over his shoulders, hurried home to lay it at the feet of the

maiden who, next day, would be his bride. He had left Blue Violet drinking in the warm sun with the other wild flowers, but when he returned his friends met him, saying: —

"Make strong your heart, Monyomo, or grief will crush it!"

Where a man loves, there will his heart fly as a mother bird turns ever toward her nestlings; so my thoughts at once turned to Blue Violet.

"Is she ill?" I asked.

"Worse, friend, worse," answered my people, fearing to look me in the face.

"Is she dead? Life of my life, is she dead?" I asked.

"Worse, friend, worse," came the answer.

"Ah, the whites!" I cried, and my head hung in anguish.

"Yes," answered my friends. "Five white men rode into our village when all our young braves were away. One of the white tribe saw Blue Violet and tried to coax her to go with him. She refused. Then he took her in his arms, placed her before him on his horse, and rode away with her."

The weight of the white man's hand had

fallen upon me, and I knew why so many of our men had counselled for war. The deer I was carrying fell to the ground. I turned my back upon my wigwam and went out among the hills of Wyandotte Wyolyo to be alone with my sorrow and my god. I climbed the rocky steeps until nightfall; then I shouted aloud to Wyandotte Wyolyo and told him of my grief. When I had spoken, a great black cloud came upon the sky before me, and on the cloud, fire from heaven burned the figure of a blood-red tomahawk. Soon Wyandotte Wyolyo, the god, spoke in tones of rolling thunder: —

"Go back to your village, Monyomo, and gather your braves. On the morrow's night, when the new moon has gone to rest with the sleeping sun, march upon the white tribe. Burn and kill! Burn and kill! Spare not! That which the people of this accursed race has done to you, do you even so to them, a thousand fold. An honest man pays his just debts, and the debt of a righteous vengeance must be paid by every brave man that owes it. When you have killed the whites and burned their houses, take the maiden, Blue Violet. Bring her to

me and leave her on the stone whereon you are now standing. She shall be your sacrifice to me. She is the price I ask for giving you revenge. Do you promise that sacrifice?"

Monyomo sadly gave his promise to the god and hurried back to the tribe. Word was passed among the warriors, and the next day was spent in sharpening knives and tomahawks. The sun seemed to stand still in the sky, so slowly did it drag its weary way across the blue, and when it had sunk, the new moon hung like a taunting laggard in the blackened west. That night was to have been my wedding feast, but in its place there would be a wedding of death, and my tomahawk should be the high priest.

After a weary time of waiting the moon sank into the arms of the sun, and darkness fell upon the river and the hills. Monyomo and his braves started silently for the village of the whites. By midnight they were upon it. Not a word was spoken. So silently did the Wyandottes do their work that even the watch dogs were not aroused. Dark, noiseless figures glided here and there and everywhere among the houses, and quick as

an eagle pounces upon its prey, half the wigwams in the white village were in flames.

Monyomo had said to his men: "Kill and kill, but spare the women and watch for Blue Violet."

Soon the white men began to run from their houses, but they all met death. They fell before the just vengeance of the Wyandottes, as the corn falls before the corn knife. Monyomo ran from house to house, calling, "Blue Violet, Blue Violet, Blue Violet!" When he had almost despaired of finding her, she answered and ran, laughing and weeping, to his arms. But he did not take her to his heart. He said: "You are not for me. I will tell you when we go back to the hills."

Of that night's work I love to speak.

"There is the man who stole me," cried Blue Violet, pointing to a white man just emerging from a door. I sprang upon him as a wildcat springs upon its prey. I disdained my tomahawk and did not touch my knife. I clutched his throat and killed him with these hands.

No woman or child perished by act of ours, but every man of the white village died that

night and was left for the carrion crows. When our task was finished, we hurried back to the hills and prepared for war. We knew that the whites would come from far and near to wage the war of extermination against our tribe, so we counselled among ourselves to learn, if possible, what was best to do.

First of all, it was our duty to offer Blue Violet as a sacrifice to Wyandotte Wyolyo. I loved my god, but my heart was as heavy as a black stone at the thought of losing my bride. The morning after the battle I did not go near her. I was sick with grief, and was not brave enough to tell her the truth. I could endure my own pain much easier than I could bear her sufferings. Presently she came to me and said: —

"Will you not take your bride, Monyomo?"

"I cannot, I cannot!" I answered, turning my face from her.

"Why can you not?" she asked. "It is my right to know, for it was not of my will that I was stolen by the whites."

"It is not because you were stolen by the whites, Blue Violet, that I do not take you for my wife. You are still to me what the

pure violet of spring is to the sun, what the sweetbrier blossom is to the sighing wind. I would gladly give all I have in the world, my life, my heart, to call you wife; but the god, Wyandotte Wyolyo, demands you, a sacrifice, as the price of your rescue and our vengeance."

Tears came to her eyes, and she said: —

"But I am here, and our people have had their revenge. We need not pay the debt to Wyandotte Wyolyo. He can but kill us. I do not fear death, it is but a dreamless sleep beneath the flowers in spring and the snows in winter; but I do want you for my husband, and I am unhappy that you, who have waited so long and patiently for me, should forego the happiness your life has earned. Wyandotte Wyolyo will not know, nor will he care. Keep me for your own, Monyomo. The god will forget your promise, and the sun will shine once more for you and for me."

It hurt my ears to hear her entreaties, but with nimble tongue she spoke from an overflowing heart and almost tempted me to break my word with the god who had given us our vengeance. She drew me to her side

and painted the picture of the future with such sweet grace that it took all my manhood to resist entering into the heaven of her love. But my manhood came to my help, and I left her weeping.

That evening I led her to the barren hills and left her amid their desolation, standing on the spot whereon I had stood before the god.

We rested for a week, but we knew that trouble was ahead. From time to time our scouts brought in news that the white tribe was gathering a great army of men, armed with small guns and with great guns on wheels, and that they were coming to wipe our tribe from the face of the earth, as a warrior wipes the war paint from his forehead after battle. We watched and waited for their approach.

Another sharp-horned moon had come and the Wyandottes had begun to hope that the whites would not molest them; but one day, as the sun was sinking, our scouts came running to tell us that the white man's army was but two hours distant.

We called a council of the wise men and the braves to determine what we should do.

Our scouts said the white man's army outnumbered the Wyandottes as the leaves of a tree outnumber the fruit. I and our warriors wanted to fight and die; but the wise men said we must consider the women, the children, and the aged.

They said: "The white man will have no mercy on these, and though death is sweet when it comes to a brave man fighting in a cause he loves, it is terrible to those who cannot resist, but must die while the blood is cold in fear. These white men will kill our women, children, aged and feeble ones, and will carry our young women into a captivity worse than death. We must not fight. We will escape to the hills; and thence we may be able to travel toward the setting sun, where the curse of the white man's shadow has not fallen."

That night we left our wigwams and started for the hills of Wyandotte Wyolyo, hoping that the god that had given us vengeance would lead us from under the yoke. When we reached the top of the first foothill, we could see the white man's army swarming in our deserted village. We saw the flames of our wigwams, and as the shad-

ows of night were about to fall, we saw the white men hurrying toward us in pursuit. But the white man is lazy and will not work at night. Soon after dark we saw their campfires, and then we sent back scouts to watch their camp.

The road ahead of us was unknown to any of our tribe, for the hills were sacred to our god, and we had never trespassed upon them. In the darkness of the night we rested; but before the east was pink we rose with the gray dawn, and again took up our journey to our god in the hope that he would help us in the time of our dire need.

Hardly had we started when we saw the enemy in pursuit. The white men were all young and active. Our braves were active, too, and they might easily have escaped; but our women, children, and old men moved slowly, and there was no thought in our hearts of deserting them.

By noon the white men were so close upon us that their bullets almost reached our braves who were guarding the rear. The whites would be upon us in less than half of half an hour. I saw no hope, and in desperation prepared to die fighting. Our people

numbered less than ten score souls. The work the whites had begun a few years before would soon be finished, and our tribe would be like the sunlight of yesterday.

To continue our flight was hopeless. We could die where we were quite as well as farther on. Therefore I said: —

"My people, we will ascend this hill, pass to the other side, and stop at the spot where Wyandotte Wyolyo gave me his promise of vengeance. There the rocks will give us some protection, and there our god may hear our cry for help. If he does not hear us, we will offer our blood as a sacrifice to him, and he will avenge our wrongs."

Before us was a high hill, shaped like the half of an egg. When we reached the top, the white men were at the foot, shouting and triumphant, thirsting for our blood and confident of getting it. The Wyandottes hurried down the north side of the hill, and when they were halfway toward the foot, I recognized the spot whereon I had left Blue Violet a month before, a sacrifice to our god. I shouted to my people to stop, and then I called to Wyandotte Wyolyo for help. I had called thrice when the answer came.

By my side grew a great flowering bush that sprang from the hard rock as good sometimes comes from evil, and from the bush came Blue Violet. I took her to my arms, and said: —

"The white men are upon us. Their numbers are as the stars on a clear night. Ask Wyandotte Wyolyo to help us or we are lost!"

She turned quickly to the flowering bush, drew it to one side, and said: —

"Enter here."

I looked, and there I beheld, opening into the rock, a doorway large enough for three stooping men to enter at the same time. I lost not one moment, but immediately ordered my people to enter this refuge the god had offered us. The women, children, and the aged ones were the first to enter the home of Wyandotte Wyolyo; then the young men followed, and the last to go was Monyomo. He lingered, hidden by the flowering bush, to watch the white men. He had not long to wait, for hardly had the last of the Wyandottes entered the home of their god when the white men came swarming to the crest of the hill like wolves in pursuit of a doe.

They were shouting in triumph, and were ready with their guns to send death upon the Indians, whom they expected to see on the open ground below them. They paused for a moment on the crest of the hill, and then rushed down among the rocks, expecting there to find us hiding like foxes. Halfway down the hill they halted by the flowering bush, and cursed and growled like wolves disappointed of their prey. I watched from behind the flowering bush and I felt that my people were safe. Had not Wyandotte Wyolyo made for us a refuge in the heart of the rock? Had he not given us life at the hands of the sacrifice we had made to him?

All day the whites sought us among the rocks; but when evening approached they marched back over the hills, and I, hiding behind the rocks, watched them until they were lost in the darkness of the night. Then I entered into the heart of the rock where my people were hiding, to cheer them with the news that our enemy had left us with our god.

I found the Wyandottes sitting hand in hand in a great vaulted chamber. Surely no one could doubt that it was the handiwork

of our god. In it there was room for all and for many more. I did not see all the chamber when first I entered, but when I told my people that the white men had departed, our braves crept out through the flowering bush to gather wood, and we kindled a fire. Then all the marvels of this wondrous home of our wondrous god were shown to our eyes.

I asked for Blue Violet. I was sitting by the fire, and soon she knelt by my side. She placed her arms about my neck, saying: —

"My Monyomo, Wyandotte Wyolyo has given me back to you, but Blue Violet is dying for food. She has eaten only a handful of roots and a few berries since you left her here, a sacrifice to the god of our people. She stood until nightfall where you left her, but Wyandotte Wyolyo did not come. She was tired and cold, and when a bird flew from the flowering bush, she thought to find a poor shelter under the branches and the leaves, but when she stooped to lie down beneath the bush, the god made an opening in the rock for his bride, and she entered. Here she waited, faithful to your command, for Wyandotte Wyolyo to come and take her; but he did not come, and now he has returned her to you,

Monyomo, and she will never leave you again."

Her cheeks, once so round and red, were sunken and gray. Her great eyes, once so soft and brown, were dim, and her breath came fitfully. My Blue Violet had faded while dutifully waiting for her god to take her, that she might save her tribe.

I was up before the sun next morning, and Wyandotte Wyolyo giving me good fortune, I soon killed a doe and took it to Blue Violet and my people. Blue Violet ate sparingly of the meat, and then she sat beside me with her head upon my breast. Thus we sat for hours in sweet silence. I thought she slept, but after a time her thin hand grew cold, and I knew she slept the sleep of death. We buried her among the rocks of Wyandotte Wyolyo's home; and, saving Balserbrent and Tomandybilladdison, who have been kind to me, I hate every white man that breathes the breath of life!

While I was watching the white men, Blue Violet had shown my people an opening to an inner cave. The opening was so small that two persons could not pass through together, and a very large man would find

difficulty in entering at all. The opening was so cunningly concealed by rocks that one in the first cavern might easily fail to find it. This second doorway in the rock led to the real home of the god, Wyandotte Wyolyo.

In it are beautiful chambers, as many as the fishes in the river. One must learn their winding ways if he would walk through them, or he will perish in the heart of the rocks. In the chambers and halls of this great cave are the white devils that guard the home of the god; but the god turned them to rock for the sake of his people, and drove the wolves from the door that we might find refuge from the whites.

The Wyandottes lived in the home of their god for many moons, but the white men sought our lives, and one by one our braves were killed while seeking food for the old people, the children, and the squaws. We lived like hunted wild beasts, and were always in the shadow of death. Our life was half death for want of food, but at times we were able to take from the white men a poor mouthful.

One day our braves brought in three white

men whom they had captured. The white men all died that night.

At the foot of the hill where the white men had been captured was a wagon that had belonged to them. We hoped to find food in the wagon, but we found nothing save fine silks, rich cloths, and five small chests, which we carried to the cave. In these chests was gold — the white man's god. For it he will give his blood, his life, his honor. It was worthless to us. We could not eat it and we dared not go among the whites to use it in buying food.

Our people were starving, and one by one they died, until there were left out of the ten score souls barely four score. These left the cave by ones and twos, and a day dawned when Monyomo sat alone in the home of his god and begged for death.

But death is a blessing that Wyandotte Wyolyo sends to man only when he has earned it. Monyomo had not earned his black crown, so he left the cave, kissed the rock under which Blue Violet lay, and ever since that day has been a wanderer upon the face of this hard, cruel earth.

From you, Tomandybilladdison, and from

you, Balserbrent, I have had the first kindness that has ever come to me by the hand of a white man. I and my people are to the white people what the doe is to the wolf. May the God of your people and the god of my people judge between us. I have said.

Wyandotte wound his blanket about him, took his gun, knife, and hatchet, and started for the door. We begged him to remain, and offered him our hut for a home, but he shook his head. While he was standing in the door, I said: —

"Tell us where the cave is, Wyandotte."

He turned quickly upon us with a glare of anger, and said: —

"I wondered if good for the sake of good could come from a white man's heart. You have been kind to me because you hoped to find the gold. Hope no more."

"We knew nothing of the gold when we took you in and cared for you, and nursed you back to life," said Balser.

His face seemed to soften, and he answered, "True." Then he went out into the darkness and we saw him no more.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLOOD AND THE MOTHER BEAR

LET a hint of hidden treasure once get into a boy's head (said Uncle Tom Andy Bill next evening, when we were all settled cozily about the fire) and everything else gets out. There is a fascination about it that no boy can resist, and, in my opinion, no right-minded boy ought to try to resist it.

After Wyandotte left us, Balser and I sat before the fire talking excitedly about the gold that lay hidden somewhere in the marvellous cave.

"Five chests!" exclaimed Balser. "I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, we must find that cave!"

"Yes," said I, "we must; but how can we? One moon, two moons, three moons journey from here. He might as well have said that the treasure was *in* the moon for all the good his story does us."

"But think of it," said Balser. "Five

chests! Suppose there are one thousand dollars in each chest, and no decent chest would think of having less; that would make five thousand dollars. Why, I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, we would be rich if we could find it. Twenty-five hundred dollars apiece! We could each buy three hundred acres of ground — of good ground — if we could find the treasure."

"Many a man has fallen over that little word 'if,'" said I.

"Oh, but we know so much about it already," returned Balser. "We know that it is hidden in Wyandotte's cave. We know that the cave is near a great river, and we know even the number of chests of gold. We know all except the exact location of the cave."

"Yes," said I, sarcastically; "that's all we don't know. How much more, for goodness' sake, would you like *not* to know?"

"I admit it's a good deal not to know," said Balser, "but what we have heard I think is a good deal *to* know. Wyandotte said the cave was near a great river. He must have meant the Ohio River."

"Or the Mississippi," I interrupted.

"Yes, he may have meant the Mississippi, or any other river, but we'll have that treasure some day, just as sure as you're alive," said Balser.

And I said, "I hope you're right."

Balser and I continued to talk about the treasure until long past midnight, when we turned in and dreamed of chests of gold and caves and Indians, until Solomon awakened us singing for corn.

After the Wyandotte gold got to ringing in our ears, the pelts we took seemed almost worthless, and our zest in the work sadly flagged. We did not, however, neglect the traps and guns, but we loved best to sit before the fire after supper, discussing the treasure and talking of what we would do with the money. At times we said we would buy land, but the land would have to be cleared and clearing was very hard work. We thought of a great many uses to which we could put the money, but always fell back upon one plan; Balser would give his part of the gold to his father and I would give my part to my father.

"Won't it be great," said Balser, "when I go into the house and throw a bag full

of something down on the floor in front of father, and say kind of careless like, 'There's a present for you, father;' and father will look at it kind of careless like, and he'll say, 'What is it, son?'—and I'll say: 'Oh, nothing much. Just a little gold,'—and then— My! I wish I knew where the cave is!"

I suppose there is not a man living who has become rich, having been poor, who will not say that his anticipation of wealth was far sweeter than the realization. I tell you, one dream dollar is worth a double eagle of gold, though I admit that it will not buy as much to eat. As long as I live, I'll never forget our dreams of treasure while sitting before the fire on our stump chairs in the cabin on Brandywine. We were rich then —richer than Crœsus—in health, youth, and dreams. My life! what more could a man ask? Health, youth, and dreams! That's the stuff heaven is made of.

The old man leaned forward, gazing in revery at the fire, but he did not see the flames nor the glowing embers. He saw two boys sitting happily together in their rude

cabin, dreaming and talking in their dreams. It was as if he were looking through an inverted telescope back through the long years. The boys looked so small and so far away that they seemed to him like beings of another race living in another world. We all knew what Uncle Tom Andy Bill was thinking about, and no one spoke a word to disturb his retrospection. Even little Mab felt the touch of sympathy, and reached up from her chair, slipping her dimpled hand into his. He kissed it, lifted his head, sighed, and continued: —

"Ah, life was sweet." Then he relapsed into silence again. After a little time one of the older girls said: —

"It is sweet now, Uncle Tom."

"So it is, so it is. It's always sweet, but when one gets old, some one else must furnish the sugar," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "I believe I'll tell you about the flood," continued the Adopter.

"Oh, no," protested Mab. "Tell us another bear story. We had all about the flood in Sunday-school last Sunday. The teacher told us all about the ark, and the animals, and Noah. We know all about that, and — "

"No, no, I don't intend to tell you about *that* flood," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "The flood I'll tell you about occurred while Balser and I were living in the cabin on Brandywine, and the only animals that took any part in it were Solomon, Tige and Prince, a mother bear, and her cubs."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mab, laughing contentedly and settling herself in her chair. "Now go ahead."

Mab was the toast-master and started the speaker off every evening.

THE STORY

Well, the flood came upon us as most troubles come — with a rush. It happened during the latter part of February. The winter had been very cold, and snow had accumulated in great quantities on the ground. I don't know that I have ever seen a more beautiful winter than that was. During the last week in February we noticed indications of a break in the cold weather. I especially remember one night. Balser and I were talking "treasure," as usual, before the fire. The room was too warm, and I opened the door. When I sat down again, I said: —

"We'd better be moving home, Balser, or the snow will melt, and poor Solomon will have to drag the sled over the bare ground. That would break his heart, and if we want to save him the trouble, we will have to be going pretty soon."

"You're right," answered Balser. "There's another danger, too. If the snow melts quickly, Brandywine will come up before we can bat our eyes, and we'll be surrounded by water. The few acres of ground immediately about here is high enough to protect us from a small flood, but back of us the ground is low and the creek is in front. If we wait till the snow melts, you and I and Solomon will have to wait for the flood to go off, for we will be on an island. The cabin is on rather low ground, and the flood might reach even up to us. In that case, it would drive us to the little knoll behind the cabin, and we would be without shelter."

"That's right," said I. "Let us take up our traps to-morrow and start for home the day after."

"Agreed," answered Balser. "Then we'll sell our pelts and start out to find the treasure."

"Which way will you start?" I asked, laughing. "One moon, two moon, three moon. I tell you, Balser, we might as well start for *the* moon."

Balser's dreams, you see, were far more real to him than mine were to me.

"I don't know which way we'll start," he answered, slightly nettled. "If you don't want to *try* to find the treasure, say so, and I'll try it alone, for I tell you, Tom Andy Bill, I'm determined to have that gold. If we try, we may fail — probably shall; but if we don't try at all, we'll be sure not to find it."

"Your reasoning is good, Balser," I responded. "I do want to try, but while I love to dream about it and to talk about it, I'll tell you candidly that I haven't much faith in Wyandotte's gold. But I should like to know your plan for beginning to try."

You see I lacked imagination and persistency, and Balser had plenty of both.

"I haven't a plan," he answered hesitatingly; "but I suppose the first thing to do is to ask everybody we meet whether they know of any caves. If any one should happen to tell us of a great cave near a river — well, we'll quit ploughing corn and go

to that cave. But if we hear of none that answers Wyandotte's description, we'll wait till after the corn is laid by, and then we'll start out on our own hook. I would suggest that we go to towns along the Ohio River and ask the people if they know of any caves in their vicinity, and — and — "

"By George, it's a good plan, Balser!" said I; "there is hope."

"Of course there is," he responded.

From that hour I too was afire with the treasure fever.

Next morning when we awakened, the weather had turned cold again, and we decided not to move until we saw further indications of a break.

The latter part of a cold winter is the best time to take fur-bearing animals. They long for spring and come out of their burrows in search of food. It was during February that we captured most of the beavers taken by us that year. February was the cream of the season, as I might say. In ten days we took more than fifty beaver pelts, twice as many minks, and a score of weasels. We killed no less than a dozen red foxes, and so many muskrats and coons that we lost count. Of

course, we devoted most of our time to hunting beavers, because their fur was far more valuable than that of any other animal we could take except bear. As I have told you, the weather turned cold again; so we remained, and we *did* take a fine lot of skins.

I remember breaking up a beaver dam that extended entirely across the creek about a mile above the cabin. The dam was most cunningly constructed. No man could have built a better one. It was made of the branches of trees and logs. Many of the logs were six inches in diameter. The branches and logs were knit together most adroitly and were covered with leaves, grass, and mud. So completely did the dam obstruct the creek that a mill-pond was created extending nearly half a mile up-stream.

On the morning that we made the great haul, we found all our traps full. We killed the beavers that had been caught in the traps by striking them on the head with a heavy club. After we had emptied our traps, Balser walked out on the dam and found that the warm weather had melted the ice in places about the logs and tree branches. He tried to loosen them and soon found several that

yielded to his efforts. He drew out three or four loose logs, and then thrust a long pole down into the dam. This, of course, caused consternation among the poor little beavers, and they began to run out through the tunnel that served them as a doorway and opened above the water line on the bank. I stood at the opening, club in hand, and killed the beavers as they came out. That morning, I think, we got twenty-two.

It seemed cruel to kill the beautiful little animals, and I was sore of conscience, but there were two good reasons for killing them. One was that we wanted their pelts. That reason alone might not have justified us, but the second one did. It was this: no orchard could live in the neighborhood of a beaver dam. The little pests gnawed the bark from the young fruit trees and killed them as fast as the farmers could plant them. But they did even greater damage than this. Their dams blockaded the streams, backing the water over the bottom land and ruining the ground for agricultural purposes.

I have heard a great deal of sympathy expressed for the thousands of wild animals that were slaughtered by the settlers in early

days; but it was war to the death between man and the beasts of the forest. The settlers' greatest enemy was these wild animals. The fox, the mink, the weasel, the coon, and the muskrat would often depopulate a large poultry yard in one night. Turkeys, chickens, ducks, and geese could be raised only by keeping them constantly in sight or by confining them in substantial buildings, and the farmers were too poor to construct these.

Two or three bears and a herd of deer once destroyed a large field of young corn for my father. In one night he lost an entire season's work by their depredations. I remember one winter Balser's father lost six fine fat shoats that he was saving for his winter's meat. Bears killed them all in one night. Bill Kaster lost nineteen sheep between sunset and sunrise. I tell you, the settlers had to kill the game or move out of the country. But I was always soft-hearted about it, and now that the poor animals are conquered, I would not shoot one in cold blood.

I have hunted the beasts and the birds of the forest as much, I suppose, as any man of my years, but I stopped when the foe was

conquered, and now the poor wild things should be allowed to live. There are not many left, and the rich farmer of to-day is able to protect himself against them. But when I was a boy we had to kill them in self-defence.

But I must get back to the story of the flood. The weather remained cold, and Balser and I were so busy taking pelts that we forgot what we had said about the thaw. During the warm days the ice had broken, and it was banked up in huge piles at the drifts and bends in the creek. The drifted ice so completely dammed the stream in many places that a warm day and a heavy rain might flood us in a few hours, but we clung to the cabin.

One morning we awakened to find the sun as bright and almost as warm as on a fair May day. Two such days would spoil the snow.

After feeding Solomon, Balser came back to the cabin, where I was getting breakfast, and said: —

"We'll go home to-morrow, sure, Tom Andy Bill, or we will be flooded."

By noon the weather was warmer, the sky

was overcast with clouds, and the rain began to fall in torrents. We knew then that the flood would soon come, so we prepared for instant flight. But we had waited too long. By four o'clock the flood was coming down the creek like a tidal wave, and by six o'clock we were on an island of perhaps twenty acres in extent.

Part of the island — it may have been as much as four or five acres — was higher than the ground on which our cabin and Solomon's stable stood. The flood could not reach the highest point. We hoped the water would not reach the cabin, though when we turned in that night, we were not at all sure that we would not be afloat before morning. But when we woke up, the water was still quite a distance below the cabin, and we felt confident it would not reach us unless the rain continued for an unusual period. But the rain did continue.

For a day or two Balser and I were busily engaged in packing away our pelts in bundles and in removing them to the higher ground, where we constructed a rude shelter of tree branches and swamp grass straw. The work did not last long, and when it was fin-

ished we had nothing to do but to sit about the cabin and talk "treasure." When the rain ceased, the sun shone out gladly, and the air was as balmy as in spring. The country, at that time, was not drained as it is now; therefore the floods passed off slowly. The great quantities of melting snow also prolonged the flood, and it seemed to Balser and me that the yellow, turbid water had come to stay. Several days of bright, warm sunshine passed, until at length the grass began to grow, and the wild flowers and even the leaves of the trees were coaxed into bud before their time. Balser and I were growing tired of our imprisonment, but a more serious matter confronted us. Our provisions were running short. The warm weather had spoiled our fresh meat, and our meal and potatoes were rapidly disappearing. There was no game on the island that we had been able to find. The wild inhabitants of the forest had been wise enough to move before the flood.

Day after day we loafed about aimlessly until we were tired of even our treasure dreams. We would sit by the creek or in the cabin, and often, when the sun was warm,

we would stretch ourselves in a bright spot on the new grass and the wild flowers, and would "snooze" like sleepy cats, waiting for the flood to ebb.

One bright, warm day I stretched myself in a patch of sunshine a few hundred yards from the cabin. I don't know how long I had been sleeping when I was awakened by the touch of something cold on my face. When I opened my eyes, I gazed up into an inquisitive-looking, sharp-snouted, black, frowsy little countenance that seemed to be laughing at me. It was the cold nose belonging to this little face that had disturbed my slumbers. Just above the saucy little face was a larger one, and — Moses! maybe I wasn't frightened! What I saw was a bear cub and its mother.

I shouted in my fright and began to rise. The bears were as much frightened as I and quickly turned tail. I sat up and looked after them, taking considerable satisfaction from the feeling that I had frightened them as badly as they had frightened me. There were three in the bear family — the mother and two cubs. A mother bear with cubs doesn't run far if her children lag behind.

I suppose no animal that lives, not even a doe, is as curious as a bear cub.

After my friends had retreated to a little distance, the cubs turned to look at me. They seemed to laugh at the curious object they had disturbed, and doubtless thinking that I was an animated log, wanted to examine the natural wonder.

I stood where I had risen, and presently the mother bear grunted not unlike a pig, summoning her children to follow her. The disobedient cubs did not move, and she came back to them, placed herself between me and her babies, and rose defiantly to her feet, as if to say, "Don't you touch one of my cubs." I stood still, and soon the mother bear fell to all fours, turned toward the cubs, and placing her long snout under them, began to root them forward as a pig roots the ground.

It was amusing and beautiful to see the great, clumsy, loving mother trying to "root" her children out of danger. I watched her for a long time. She gave the stubborn cubs a boost forward with her snout, scolding them with grunts and growls the while, and turning every few seconds toward me, half in

anger, half in fear. I could plainly hear her say to the cubs: —

"Go on, you little fools. Don't you know that is a man, the most dangerous animal in the world?"

But the cubs, like many another fool that doesn't know danger when he sees it and mistakes his lack of wisdom for bravery, wanted to see more of this dangerous animal and tried to run back to me. They were not afraid! No, not they! At such times the poor old mother bear would run clumsily after the awkward cubs, growling, grunting, and scolding in great tribulation. Presently she became angry in earnest, and struck one of the cubs a blow with her paw that sent it tumbling down a little hill, howling and whining as if it were being killed. After that the youngsters toddled on ahead while the old bear, anxiously glancing back at me, waddled after them and soon disappeared in the thicket. I followed, but lost them in the underbrush, and returned to the cabin.

I told Balser of my adventure, when we at once shouldered our guns and started in pursuit. We forgot the dogs and left them

sleeping on the sunny side of the cabin. Afterward we were glad that we had not disturbed their rest.

The island was small, and we felt sure the old bear would not try to escape by swimming because we supposed her cubs could not follow her. They would perish in the water, which was cold and broad and swift, — too cold and broad and swift for even Balser or me to try to swim, — and the loving old bear would never desert her cubs. She would bravely stay by their side, and would give her life to save them without one thought of herself. Balser and I, therefore, felt sure that we could not fail to bag the whole family.

We hurried to the spot where the bears had entered the thicket, thrust aside the bushes, and soon took up the spoor on the soft ground. The tracks were plainly visible and were always in the same relative position — the cubs in front and the mother in the place of danger, guarding their retreat.

I confess my heart softened when I thought of the old mother bear holding her life as nothing for the sake of her cubs, but my sympathy did not check our pursuit.

We moved cautiously and silently, with guns always ready for instant use, for we knew that the mother bear would fight like forty demons when she learned that her cubs were in danger. We knew that when she saw us and realized that we were after her children, she would charge upon us without the slightest fear. She would, if she could, engage us at peril of her own life while her cubs escaped, and would gladly give us every drop of her blood to save her young. I felt like a wolf — a cowardly wolf. But it seemed to be our duty to kill the bears, and we hurried forward on our mission of death. We made slow progress through the thicket, but we knew we could not have far to go until the water would stop us and the bears.

After we had followed the tracks a short distance into the thicket, we came to a small hill upon which grew several large walnut trees. We ascended the hill and as our heads rose above the crest, we saw the mother bear and her cubs playing in a small sunlit ravine just below us. We each hid behind a large tree to watch them.

Poor old mother bear! She thought she

had taken her family to a place of safety, but no place is safe from that most dangerous of all animals, man. Believing herself safe, she had relaxed her vigilance and was playing with her babies. No prettier sight ever greeted the eyes of a murderous hunter. She lay upon her back with all four feet in the air, and when the playful cubs ran to her, she pushed them away with her great, horny paw as gently as a mother touches the chin of the babe cooing in her lap. Then she would let them clutch her paw or her great, hairy throat between their baby jaws, and would allow them to "wool" her as a puppy does its playmate.

If, for a moment, being out of breath, the cubs rested on their haunches, laughing and panting with their little red mouths open and their tongues hanging out, she would incite them to renew the frolic by feinting at them with her paws or by lifting her lips from her white teeth in mimic anger. Then the awkward, precious cubs would fall upon her with fierce baby growls, and the dear old mother bear, all unconscious of the overhanging shadow of death, revelled in the sweetest bliss that bear or man can know.

For five minutes Balser and I watched the touching little comedy with its impending tragic end. When the cubs were tired and out of breath, they lay down beside the mother in the balmy warmth of the sun, and she licked their downy sides till they shone with the lustre of her love. Twice I saw Balser lift his gun to fire, but twice he lowered it. I glanced at his face, and I thought that tears were in his eyes. I tried to lift my gun, but some way my heart failed me.

"Don't be a fool, Tom Andy Bill," I said to myself; "you are as soft-hearted as a chicken."

I tried to coax myself to shoot and failing in that, I tried to bully myself, but for a time it was all of no avail. I could neither coax nor drive myself to send the fatal bullet on its mission of death. Presently I clinched my teeth, determined to fire the shot. I lifted my gun to my shoulder and glanced toward Balser. He looked at me with a curious expression on his face, and my gun came down again. I shook my head dolefully, as if to say, "I can't do it," and he shook his head, but neither of us spoke a word. We watched the bears a moment longer, and wishing to lead ourselves out of

temptation, noiselessly turned away and started down the hill.

We stole back to the crest of the hill for one more look, and saw the mother bear stretched full length in the sunshine, the two cubs lying with their frowsy baby heads resting upon her brave, tender heart. I would not have killed her for all the Wyandotte treasure laid at my feet.

We went back in silence to our cabin, and Balser began to prepare supper.

"The meal is getting dangerously low," said he, "and there's not over two pecks of potatoes left. If the flood doesn't soon go down, we may have to kill the old bear or starve."

"I'll swim for it first," said I. "I'll let the old bear alone if she doesn't bother me."

"Did you ever see anything more beautiful?" asked Balser.

"It was human," I answered; "and all my life I'll be glad to think that I had enough humanity in my heart not to kill her."

"God seems to have scattered love broadcast on this earth," said Balser, who should have been a poet. "I believe it is the magic bond that holds the world together."

The longer I live, the more convinced I am that he was right.

That night the rain came on again. My life, how it did pour down! Soon after dark it came in torrents. We lay for a long time listening to the fierce patter on the roof, talking about the mother bear and dreaming of Wyandotte's treasure; but our eyes were always full of sleep and nothing could keep us awake for long.

At times during the night we were awakened by thunder. How it did boom and rumble! It seemed as if the sky were scolding the earth with the voices of a thousand cannon. The lightning, too, was like a constant conflagration in the clouds, but we soon grew accustomed to the fierce war and went to sleep again.

I don't know how long we had slept when I was aroused by the barking of Tige and Prince just outside the door.

"Keep still!" I shouted, but the dogs continued to bark, and I, becoming angry, rose and opened the door to silence them. When I put my feet down to the floor from the slightly elevated platform on which we had made our bed, I stepped into three inches of

water, and you may be sure I was frightened and surprised. I aroused Balser, saying: —

"The flood is upon us! Hurry! Hurry!"

He drowsily rubbed his eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Do lie down and let a fellow sleep. You prowl about like a night owl."

For answer I drew him to the edge of the bed and rolled him off into the cold water. That opened his eyes, and maybe he wasn't mad! But I had no time to waste in wordy explanations.

The fire was drowned out and the cabin floor was all afloat. Balser quickly arose from his early morning bath. Without a word we each began to gather armloads of provisions, guns, and utensils, and at once started for the high ground.

The night was so dark that we could hardly see our way, but we knew the path, and very soon we had deposited our loads out of reach of the water. Then we went back for another load. Fortunately our belongings were few, and the second trip saved all our valuables.

The rain was still falling in torrents and the night seemed to grow blacker after each flash of lightning. We placed all our perish-

able goods under the shelter prepared for the pelts, but we had no roof for ourselves. We congratulated each other on our lucky escape with the provisions, etc., and while we were wondering if we had left anything in the cabin, we were startled by a song — a complaining tearful wail — from Solomon. We had forgotten the poor wise one, and he was grieved and hurt, as we could easily discover from the emotional tremor in his voice.

Without a word we both ran to Solomon's rescue. When we reached his stable, we found him standing knee-deep in water, the picture of woe. I quickly haltered him and led him out. He, of course, was justly provoked; but when we reached the high ground, Balser stroked his ears by way of apology for our neglect, and the wise one's accustomed good nature soon returned.

While Balser was stroking Solomon's ears, I thought of the powder keg.

"Our powder!" I cried.

Again we hurried back to the stable, but the powder could not be found. We rescued Solomon's harness and collected a few dozen ears of corn; then we hurried back to safety, for the water was rising rapidly.

It must have been well toward morning when we were aroused by the water, but we thought the night would never end. If you want to know just how long an hour is, stand out in the pouring rain on a pitch black night, and wait for the sun to come up. Time flies for the happy man, drags for the dull man, and dies for the one in trouble. That night we thought that Time was dead and buried; but Time never really dies, and after a weary while he lifted up the sun to look upon two of the most uncomfortable boys that ever fell under the luminary's gaze. Toward noon the rain ceased and the sun shone out with a barefaced effrontery that would have made you think he was unconscious of the fact that he had been shamefully lazy in rising.

We tried to build a fire, but everything, including our tinder box, was wet, and we had to content ourselves with a few raw potatoes and a handful of uncooked meal for breakfast and dinner.

"I wonder where the bear is," said Balser.

"Let's find her," I suggested. "The high ground cannot be more than five acres

in extent, and she is not far away with her cubs."

We started out with our guns to find the bear but not to kill her. The guns were taken solely as a means of self-defence. We were not long in finding the poor old brute. She had concealed herself and the cubs as best she could beneath the low-lying branches of a haw tree, where she had made a cosey nest of leaves and straw. When she saw us she at once prepared for battle, but we retreated and left her unmolested. I believe that kindness in sufficient quantities will soften the heart of anything that breathes the breath of life, and this poor old mother bear was no exception to the rule.

During the next five days a wonderful thing happened. Balser and I had grown to love the rough old mother bear, and so deeply did she interest us that we could not keep away from her nest under the haw tree. We had nothing to do but to watch her and to eat raw potatoes and uncooked meal; therefore we went to visit our neighbor many times in the day. Soon she ceased to snarl and growl at us unless we went too near. She seemed to have learned that we

meant no harm to her and her dear ones, and after a time she did not run back to her nest when she saw us approaching.

On the fourth day she came quite close to where Balser and I were sitting under a rude bark shed that we had constructed. She was ploughing up the ground with her nose, searching for roots, and paid no attention to us.

For a time we had great difficulty in restraining Tige and Prince, but after a few sound thrashings they learned good manners and did not molest the bears. Another peculiar thing happened. Tige and Prince had been the best bear fighters I have ever known, but after their acquaintance with the old mother bear and her cubs, and after we had thrashed them for attacking her, they were of no use in bear hunting. Frequently in after days we tried to make them attack bears, but we never succeeded.

Seven long days did we remain on that island. One morning — I think it was the eighth day — we saw a large boat, of the scow pattern, coming toward us. My father and Balser's father were in the boat, and you may be sure there were two happy boys

dancing at the water's edge waiting for them. They brought food and clothing, and I do believe we would have killed ourselves eating had our fathers not restrained us.

We were not long in climbing into the boat and starting for home. We took our guns and sleeping-bags, but we left the pelts until the water should subside, when we would come back to fetch them.

We started off without Solomon, knowing that he would follow us. He protested violently, indignantly, against our desertion; but when he saw that we really intended to leave him, he plunged into the water, and, after a hard swim, landed safely on the opposite bank.

While we were waiting for Solomon, we thought we saw the old mother bear swimming down-stream with her cubs clinging to her. I am not willing to vouch for the last statement, for I am not sure, but I believe it is true. An old bear hunter once told me that he had seen a mother bear swimming a small lake with a cub on her back. I don't know that he told the truth, but I like to believe stories of that sort, and I'm going to believe all I hear.

We got the pelts later on and took them

to Cincinnati, where we sold them. I'll tell you sometime about our wonderful trip to Cincinnati, and about our adventure with the robbers on the way home; but I am sleepy now, and the Sandman has been troubling Mab for quite a while.

Tom Andy Bill stopped speaking, and after a minute or two of silence, Mab said:

"Thank you, Uncle Tom Andy Bill, for not killing the mother bear."

"You are welcome, Mab," said Uncle Tom, laughing, and then, turning to us, he said, "Good night all!"

"Good night all!" echoed Mab, clinging sleepily to the favorite finger, as she went off to the beautiful home of the Sandman in the drowsy Land of Nod.

CHAPTER VIII

LOST IN THE CAVE

"TELL us some more about a mother bear and her cubs," suggested Mab, next evening, while the audience was waiting for Uncle Tom Andy Bill's story.

"I wish I could," he answered, "for I, too, like mother bears. The one I told you about is the only one I have ever known at all intimately. They are very cautious while raising their cubs, and usually make their nests in secluded spots where they believe they are safe from their mortal enemy. I have heard it said that the father bear hunts food for his family when the cubs are very young, but I don't believe the story. The father bear, in my opinion, is a very disreputable personage, and so far as I have been able to learn, looks out for 'number one' and lets his wife take care of herself and the babies.

"A man from Kentucky once told me a

story about a mother bear and a father bear that reflected no credit on the latter. I don't vouch for the truth of the story, though I believe it. I have heard many strange anecdotes concerning wild animals, and so many wonderful manifestations of their intelligence have come under my own personal observation that I believe nearly all I hear, for I know that the beasts of the forest do more thinking that goes straight to the point than the average white man does. I don't, however, vouch for anything that I haven't seen, but I don't want any one to doubt what I say I have seen."

"What was the story of the man from Kentucky?" asked Mab.

"Oh, it wasn't much," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "It wasn't a story, it was a mere incident. He said that one day he and his wife had been to town and that when they returned, and were approaching their cabin, situated in a lonely part of the forest, they heard a terrific squealing in his pig-pen. He ran to the barnyard to learn the trouble. He suspected that bears were after his shoat, and he was right.

"A short distance from the pen were two

bears and two cubs. The father bear was cuffing his wife unmercifully in an endeavor to make her climb the walls of the pig-pen and bring out the one lone shoat it contained. The shoat knew its danger and was squealing for dear life. The bears did not at first see the man.

"After considerable coaxing and many blows, the bear husband induced his wife to go into the pen and get the shoat. Over she went, and the pig squealed as it never had squealed before. The man tried to frighten the intruders away, but he had loaned his gun to a neighbor, and the bears were aware of the fact — that is, the man said they were aware of it. At any rate, they saw he had no gun, and he said they told him in grunts and growls to keep on his own side of the fence.

"The man hated to lose his shoat, but being deficient in courage, he did not molest the bears. From a safe distance he saw the she bear climb into the pen, seize the shoat in her arms, and take it to her husband. When she brought it to him, what do you suppose he did?"

"He kissed her," suggested Mab.

"No," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "He knocked her over, took the shoat away from her, went off by himself, and ate it to the last bone, without giving his wife one mouthful. It is something disgusting to see how like a certain class of human beings some animals can act.

"When the father bear had eaten the last of the shoat, the disappointed old mother bear went back to the pen and put her paws on the top rail to see if, by any chance, she had overlooked a shoat. Disappointed in the matter of young pork, she deliberately marched around the barnyard fence and approached the house with all the effrontery of a tramp.

"I suppose the man must have been right when he said that the bears knew the gun was visiting. The mother bear nosed about the house, poked her snout in at the kitchen door, and then started out to look for the milk-house with the hungry cubs toddling, waddling, and squealing at her heels.

"The man's wife was frightened at first, and, he said, she climbed a tree; but when she recovered her composure, she climbed down from the tree, went to the house, took

a shovelful of coals from the fireplace, and followed Madame Bear and her family into the milk-house.

"When the woman entered the milk-house and saw the bear and cubs drinking her milk and eating her butter, she was so angry that she threw the shovelful of hot coals in the bear's face, and so belabored it with her shovel that the surprised intruder beat a hasty retreat. But the woman's 'mad' was up, so she seized an axe, ran after the bear, struck it a mighty blow on the head, and the poor little cubs were motherless.

"After the woman had killed the mother bear, she easily killed the cubs, and then started out to hunt for the father bear. But he had escaped to the woods and, doubtless, told his friends how he had stolen a fine, fat shoat right from under a farmer's nose. The woman's husband went to town next day and told his friends how '*we* killed three bears up at our house yesterday.' So you see it isn't only a bear that sometimes acts 'human-like.' There are animals calling themselves men that sometimes act 'bear-like.'

"Reason? Of course animals reason. I

once heard of a fox that walked backward a quarter of a mile to throw his pursuers off the track. I expected you to laugh at that statement, but I believe the story. I have known foxes to drag their brushes over their tracks in the snow to obliterate them. Man is a vain coxcomb to suppose that he does all the thinking that is done in this world. There was once a dog in Central Park, New York City, that counted the sheep as they entered the fold. I saw him do it. By a little effort I believe that dog could have been taught vulgar fractions."

Uncle Tom Andy Bill silently puffed his pipe, and the audience soon began to stir nervously in their chairs, waiting for the main show. After a few minutes, Mab, as usual, lifted her soft, coaxing hand and gently grasped the favorite finger. Even that did not start the performance. The gallery, consisting of the small boys, was growing anxious, and little Dic, hoping to help matters along, asked: —

"Did you ever get the pelts, Uncle Tom?"

"Indeed we did get them. There was nearly a wagon load of the finest fur that was ever taken on Blue River. We sold it

at Cincinnati, and — well, I'll tell you about it. I've been wondering what I could tell you to-night, and that will make a fairly good story. We had at least one stirring adventure, and we brought back with us — we brought back with us a — a — girl. We found her — we found her and — and —" Uncle Tom Andy Bill stopped speaking. His great eyes glowed tenderly on Mab. He placed his hand lovingly on her head, gazed dreamily into the fire, and after a long pause, continued: —

"We found her on our way home, and after I tell you about our trip to Cincinnati and our search for Wyandotte's cave, I will tell you of the adventure that resulted in our finding the girl."

THE STORY

After the corn was laid by that summer, Balser and I took my father's team and covered wagon, loaded in the pelts, and started southeast on the famous Michigan Road for Cincinnati. In addition to provisions necessary for the journey, we had an iron pot, a skillet, and a Dutch oven. The latter was a very useful utensil. It was a

flat-bottomed round pot, eight inches in diameter and five inches deep, resting on three legs three inches high, and having a close-fitting top.

When we wished to use the Dutch oven, we heated it in the fire; then we drew it out and placed it over the hot ashes. Live coals were collected near the oven to keep it warm, but we were careful not to have the coals too close, lest it become overheated and burn the contents. We placed the corn pone (or whatever article we wished to bake) inside the oven, covered it with the top, and soon the heat of the ashes and the coals baked our supper for us beautifully.

We started from home on the last day of July, and the weather being warm and pleasant, we slept comfortably under the wagon. There were many inns along the road, but to stop at them would have required money, and we had very little of that. We therefore camped out, and preferred our bed on the ground to any that could be found in a tavern. When it rained, we spread our bearskins over the pelts inside the wagon and slept there as dry as a powder-horn.

We had often heard of a band of robbers that lived, it was said, north of the Michigan Road in the heart of a great, forest-covered swamp. It was rumored that the band consisted of one family, and it was often hinted that they were related to certain of the innkeepers along the road. No one knew much about them, and those who knew anything wanted to know less.

Once in a long while the plundering of a wagon was reported, but the robbers usually confined themselves to the gentle art of horse stealing. It was supposed that they sold their horses to dealers in Cincinnati with whom the thieves were in league.

The exact locality of the robbers' home had never been ascertained. Some claimed that they lived within a few miles of Cincinnati; others said that their home was fifty or sixty miles west of that city; but all agreed that it was in the midst of a dark forest and was surrounded by a swamp impassable to all save those who knew the key to the labyrinth leading to the robbers' abode.

As I have told you, certain taverns along the road bore a bad reputation because of their supposed connection with this robber

band. But no one could say with certainty that he knew the reputation was deserved by any one of the taverns until Balser and I discovered one that, as we learnt without question and to our sorrow, did deserve all the evil that could be said of it. But this occurred on our return journey from Cincinnati, and I'll not tell you about it until its turn comes. It was said that the family of robbers bore the name of Wolf. Whatever their names may have been, they were known throughout the length of the Michigan Road as "The Wolves," and beyond doubt they deserved their name.

For two days and nights after Balser and I started for Cincinnati, the weather was fine. We left home before sun-up one morning and drove till eleven o'clock. At that hour, the day being very hot, we halted in a beautiful little grove of water elms that grew beside a sparkling, spring-fed creek and gave a shadowy coolness to its limpid pools.

We unhitched the horses, took off their harness, watered them, and after they had rolled over and over on the soft green sod, we gave them their corn. When they had eaten their dinner, we knee-haltered them

and turned them out to graze. After Balser and I had eaten our dinner we lay down in the shade, and Balser said we kept each other awake snoring.

We rested until the greatest heat of the day was past; then we hitched up and drove along slowly through the dust and the sunshine till supper time. We did not unhitch for supper, but hurried through the meal and started on the road.

By ten o'clock we reached another creek, and there we camped for the night, sleeping in the open air under a rich elm canopy. We were tired, and though ten o'clock was a very late hour for us to be awake, we did not go to sleep at once. After we had turned in on our bed of sod, everything was so still for a time that the air seemed fairly to buzz.

We were almost asleep when suddenly there came from the branches of the tree above us a booming, roaring, reverberating "To-hoo, to-hoo, to-hoo!" I sprang to my feet, so frightened that my hair stood out "like quills upon the fretful porcupine." The doleful sounds came from an owl that probably imagined it was singing. Previous to that time I had supposed that no living

bird could emit so terrific a sound. Balser, too, sprang up, frightened, and then we laughed at each other till the tears came. I threw a stone into the tree, and the owl flew away. It did not go far, and soon again it began to sing, keeping up the serenade at intervals all night.

After a time the mournful notes of a whip-poor-will came to us from the limbs of a dead tree a short distance up-stream, and now and then the voice of a wakeful turtle-dove would come in its sad, cooing cadence through the balmy, star-pierced blue of the silence-laden night. Once in a while we heard the "peep, peep, peep" of a drowsy bird roosting in the branches above us, and ever the fitful sighing of the wind, breathing upon the leaves, set them whispering till we fancied that the air was full of fairies and the fairies full of song. But at last we went to sleep.

After a few hours we awakened just before the dawn. The night concert had ceased and the silence could almost be felt. We plunged into the creek for a bath, and just as we emerged from the water the sun shot his first messengers of gray over the

eastern edge of the world. Then you should have heard the morning concert break forth like a band of a thousand pieces.

The owl and the whip-poor-will were silent; but, bless your souls! you should have heard the meadow lark trying to ruin his voice on the high notes. You should have heard dear old "Bob White" whistling for dear life, evidently under the impression that he was an animated fife. Robin Redbreast, screaming for joy, probably thought he was a cornet or a trombone. Redbird, too, tried to burst his throat in his effort to convince the world that he was a flute, but above all came the marvellous voice of the conductor. He played all the instruments from the fife to the trombone, and so exquisite was his music that the very sun himself seemed to hasten forward to catch even the softest notes of the mocking-bird. No man knows how much happiness there is in the world till he hears the birds of the wildwood sing at dawn.

We travelled along for two or three days without adventure, but, on the evening of the third day, dark clouds began to gather in the southwest. The day had been terribly

hot, and the air was so still that it seemed to be dead, save for fitful gusts of wind that came and went at times, like the flight of a bat.

"We'll have a terrible storm to-night," said Balser, "and it will come up pretty quickly. Let's halt and unhitch."

"I'm agreed," said I, and we drew rein in the open, as far as possible from a tree. Trees, it is said, draw lightning, and we knew that the fireworks of heaven would soon begin.

We hitched and fed the horses, then prepared our bed inside the wagon. Near us was a low-growing thorn bush covered with a dense, tangled mass of wild grape vines. At first we thought of sleeping under it, but we changed our minds and concluded to use it as a shelter for our fire.

Soon after we had eaten supper the wind began to rise. The lightning in the black clouds to the southwest played vividly, and the thunder roared as if it were a genie trying to frighten the earth. When the rain began, we climbed into the wagon. For a time we listened to the fierce patter on our canvas wagon top, but sleep soon claimed us, and for our ears the storm was still.

In the middle of the night we were awakened by the howling of wolves. Our first thought was of the horses, so we seized our guns, that hung just beneath the top of the wagon, and climbed out into the storm. The vine-covered thorn bush had protected our fire from the rain, and the wind had fanned the logs into a blaze.

When we climbed down from the wagon, we saw a doe, with a fawn at her side, standing panting between us and the fire, not five feet from the horses. Three or four yards from the wagon stood two wolves. By the light of the fire we saw the dim outlines of their forms, and at intervals we heard their half-muttered growls. We also saw their eyes gleaming with reflected light like red-hot embers. The doe did not offer to run when she saw us. She had brought her fawn to us for protection against the wolves.

You may doubt this story, but long after that night, Gordon Cumming, a great African hunter, had the same experience with a frightened eland, and tells of it in his wonderful book. I lifted my gun and fired at the ember-like eyes. One wolf dropped, and the other quickly took himself off. The panting

doe remained by the horses till morning, and left us, bearing away with her, I hope, a better opinion of mankind than she had ever before enjoyed.

The next evening we reached Cincinnati, but we did not enter the city until the following morning, preferring to camp out and save the cost of lodging and meals.

We went to the fur dealer to whom we had been directed, and sold our furs for the enormous sum of three hundred and forty dollars. Being rich, we went to Longworth's famous tavern and took a room. We had a fine dinner at noon, and after we had eaten, and had counted our gold at least twenty times, we started out to see the city.

We purchased a few presents for the folks at home, and after great deliberation, we each bought a silver watch, costing us twenty dollars apiece. That silver watch was the most beautiful object I had ever possessed, and with it in my pocket, I wanted to know the time at least every three minutes.

After we had seen the sights of the city, we went down to the Ohio River. There we saw boats moored to the wharf, and learned that some of them were about to start down-

stream with their load of freight. We also learned that these freight boats stopped at the various settlements along the river, and that bit of information put a thought into our minds upon which we quickly acted. We engaged passage on a keel boat that would leave in an hour or two; then we went back to the tavern and wrote letters home to our folks, telling them that we intended to go down the river and might be away from home several weeks. You may be sure we did not mention Wyandotte's treasure, and the word "cave" did not appear upon the pages of our letters.

We paid our bill at the tavern, slung our guns over our shoulder, left our money, horses, and wagon in the care of the tavern keeper, hurried down to the wharf, and went aboard the boat, destined for the lower river and, perchance, Wyandotte's cave.

The slow-going boat moved tediously from town to town, and while the "hustlers"—pronounced "hoosier" by the negroes and natives—were unloading the freight at the various settlements, Balser and I moved about among the people, asking every one we met if there was a cave in the vicinity.

Many persons laughed at us, and one man asked us if we were hunting treasure. His remark disgusted us. Our inquiries failed to elicit any information of a cave; and after a long, tedious trip, we reached the city of Louisville, but, so far as we knew, we were no nearer Wyandotte's cave than when we left home.

We seemed so far away from Cincinnati that we felt like returning; but after discussing the matter, we concluded to take another boat and go still farther down the river for four days' journey. If, at the end of that time, we learned nothing of a cave, we would make our way back to Cincinnati, and would at least have had the pleasure of the river voyage.

After leaving Louisville our boat stopped at several settlements, but we heard no encouraging news until one day we drew up at a little nest of houses on the north side of the river, thirty or forty miles below Louisville. We had asked so many questions about caves that we had grown to expect a negative answer; but at the settlement of which I have just spoken, we were told that there was a large cave six or eight miles to the north and east.

We were almost overcome by sudden and unexpected joy, and hurried back to the boat to fetch our guns.

We remained at the settlement a day or two before we found any one who could direct us to the cave; but we finally discovered an old man who told us to go north till we came to a creek, and to follow it for six or seven miles till we reached the third house on the south side of the creek. We would then be in the neighborhood of the cave, he said, and would be able to learn its exact location. He had never been there, but he had heard from others that the creek was three or four miles north of the Ohio River, and that the cave was six or seven miles to the east.

Balser and I bought provisions sufficient to last us two weeks, shouldered our guns, and started out to hunt for Wyandotte's cave, having not the shadow of a doubt in our minds that we would find it.

We started out one morning early, and after climbing over several very impracticable hills, reached the creek and then turned eastward, following its winding course. After many hours' hard work, we came to the third cabin on the south side of the creek. We

entered and asked the usual questions concerning the cave. We had propounded them so often that we knew them by rote and spoke them parrot-like.

A woman at the house told us to go south, to cross two hills and two ravines, and upon the north side of the third hill, she said, she thought we would find a cave. She was not sure a cave was there, but she had been told that runaway negroes from Kentucky sometimes hid in a cave that was said to be in the heart of the hill. She told us they called it "Nigger Hill."

The woman invited us to stay for dinner, and while we were eating she asked us why we wanted to see the cave. I thought she could not fail to see the word "treasure" written on my face. Balser, who was much quicker of wit than I, spoke up briskly and said: —

"We heard that runaway slaves sometimes hide in a cave about here, and we have been sent to get its exact location."

"Then I am sorry I told you where it is," said the woman, "for I pity the poor slaves."

"Oh, so do we," returned Balser, hurriedly; "we would help them if we could."

"You'd better not let any one hereabouts hear you say that you would help a runaway slave," suggested the woman. "You would be tarred and feathered."

"Oh, we wouldn't help them," said Balser, floundering about in his effort to correct his mistake. "You see it's this way. We — we — well, you know we're sorry, and the people who sent us here are just curious to know what the cave is like, that's all."

After dinner we started south for three hills and two ravines. Over one hill we climbed and down into ravine number one. Up hill number two, down ravine number two, and then we looked up the rocky side of hill number three.

"If there isn't a cave in that hill," said I, "there ought to be."

"If there isn't one there," answered Balser, "there isn't a cave any place. What a barren pile of gray, forbidding rocks it is. Tom Andy Bill, we're at Wyandotte's cave just as sure as you live."

"I hope you're right," said I; "I wish you could feel my heart beating."

"Just feel this," said Balser, placing my hand over his heart.

"Shades of Columbus, sit down, Balser! Your heart's going to burst!"

Excited? Well, you should have seen us! We were trembling as if with fear. There didn't seem to be enough atmosphere in all the country around to fill the requirements of my lungs. We could feel the soft, oily gold trickling through our fingers, and I almost felt like reaching out my hand and picking up one of the five treasure chests.

We had received seventeen beautiful double eagles for our furs at Cincinnati, and had counted them over and over in our room at Longworth's tavern until I believe I should have recognized any one of them a hundred miles away from home. In fondling the double eagles, we had learned to know the "feel" of gold; but what a pitiful sum three hundred and forty dollars was compared to the treasure that awaited us in the heart of the stony hill.

"I feel sorry for myself," said Balser, "when I think of how large that little pile of gold looked to us."

"*Don't* you?" I answered. "Let us give it to the poor."

You see I was getting to feel rich. My

dreams were becoming real, and I felt that the treasury at Washington was poverty-stricken compared to myself.

Balser laughed and said, "Perhaps we had better keep the Cincinnati gold until we find the treasure and get it home."

"All right," said I; "here goes for the cave and Wyandotte's chests."

We pretended to laugh at ourselves, but the truth is, we knew that the treasure would soon be ours. We bent our backs and started up the rocky hill, each bearing his sack of provisions slung over his shoulder. When we got halfway up the hill, we halted at an overhanging rock.

"Here is a fine place to make our camp," I suggested. "We can build our fire under the south end of the rock and make our beds under the north end, where we'll be safe from sun, wind, or rain."

"It's the very place," said Balser. "We'll gather a lot of rocks and build a little wall reaching from the ground to the overhanging rock, and we will have as cosey a home as one could want."

The top of the hill was covered with trees and we felt sure we should be able to gather

material for firewood and torches. We deposited our bags of provisions under the rock, and Balser was for starting out at once in search of the cave. I insisted upon building the walls of our house first, but he wisely suggested that we might find the cave that very afternoon, and in that case, we could move in and save ourselves the work of building the wall.

It was four or five o'clock when we started out with beating hearts to find the cave. I was so sure of finding it at once that I watched carefully where I stepped, for fear, I suppose, of falling into it.

We prowled about, examining every nook and corner among the rocks, till after six o'clock. Then we went to the hilltop and each took an armful of wood down to our new home under the hanging rock. The weather was warm, so we postponed our wall building till the morrow, lay down under the rock, and went to sleep.

During the next five or six days we tramped over the hillside in the blazing sun, working fifteen or sixteen hours a day, but we found no cave. By noon of the seventh day, we felt that every rock in the hillside had been

examined, and our hearts were heavy with disappointment, for we were ready to be sworn that no cave existed on *that* hill. Our seventeen double eagles at Cincinnati gradually rose to par, and when we had despaired of finding the cave, they increased in value till they once more looked like a fortune. We concluded that we would not give them to the poor — yet.

After eating dinner on the day we gave up our search, we sat for a while under the rock, anxious yet loath to leave. Our fire was built under the south end of the rock, perhaps fifteen feet from where we were sitting. Almost unconscious of what I was doing, I threw several light pieces of wood on the fire, and soon a great blaze sprang up.

I have before remarked upon the wonderful potency of little things, and that act of mine in carelessly tossing the wood upon the fire is another marked illustration of what I mean.

We were sitting watching the fire when Balser, for lack of anything else to say, remarked carelessly: —

"I wonder what makes that fire suck in toward the wall."

"Probably the wind blows it," I suggested.

"But there's not a breath of wind," said Balser.

I stepped outside to test the wind. There was not enough to flutter a maple leaf. Still the leaping flames bent toward the inner wall of our house as if they were sucked in that direction by a draught. The effect was so pronounced that we began to look around for an opening in the rock. We had never thought to examine our own house for the cave. At the extreme south end of our overhanging rock, near the fire, was a large boulder that we supposed formed the end of the little open cavern in which we dwelt. It was toward that boulder the flames were drawn, and Balser and I made a dash for it. Just beyond the boulder, plain as an open door, was the entrance to a cave.

"Well, I *am* a fool," said Balser.

"I guess you're right," I answered, "but what am I?"

"The same," said Balser; "and I wish mother didn't object to swearing."

"Amen," answered I. "Here we have been prowling about this hill in the hot sun for nearly seven days, hunting for something that was right under our noses."

"That happens to many a man," said Balser. "We needn't worry about the work we have done. Let us go into the cave."

We stooped low and entered. Within ten feet of the opening we passed into a high-vaulted, dimly lighted chamber. We waited for our eyes to become accustomed to the gloom, and then we proceeded to look about.

"By George!" whispered Balser, as if he were afraid that some one might hear him; "this room is just as Wyandotte described it."

"It is, indeed," I answered; "I do believe we have stumbled into the god's home. Isn't it the most marvellous thing that ever happened?"

When we could distinctly see objects about us, we began our search for the treasure, but the floor was of unbroken rock and the side walls were smooth. Ten minutes' work convinced us that there was no treasure in that cave.

We had noticed a small opening in the back of the chamber, and we felt sure it led to the main cavern or caverns, since Wyandotte had said there were many chambers and corridors.

We remembered what he had told us about the danger of getting lost, but we classed that with the wolves and the guardian demons, and gave no heed to his warning. The second opening was too low for us to pass through even by stooping. We examined it and found that the floor consisted of a flat rock inclining downward at a very steep angle.

We did not stop to consider that Wyandotte might have been wrong in his description of the cave, or that the cave we were in might not have been the one he described. For all we knew, there might have been a bottomless pit at the end of the little chute; but we were intoxicated with our dreams of gold, and took no thought of possible danger ahead.

I looked down the slanting passageway, but I could see nothing but darkness. The fact that I did not know where I was going to land did not deter me. I put my feet into the narrow chute, lay down on my back, and worked myself forward.

The inclining rock was covered with moisture, and was so "slick" that I started down at a much greater speed than I had antici-

pated. When it was too late, I began to wonder where I was going to land, and visions of a bottomless pit, broken bones, and a lingering death flashed through my mind. They were, however, soon dispelled, for in less than three seconds I had accomplished my descent, and found myself sitting safely in a little pool of very cold water at the foot of the incline. I felt about me with my hands and discovered a solid rock floor similar to that of the first cavern.

"Hello, Tom Andy Bill!" shouted Balser.

I answered back, "All right! Come on!" and the next instant Balser was sitting in the cold water.

The second cavern was much darker than the first, but a faint stream of light entered through the narrow chute, and in a little while we could dimly see objects close to us.

"We'll have to have torches to examine this cave," said I. "We can't see anything in this Egyptian darkness."

"If we prowl about without a light," said Balser, "we're apt to find ourselves at the bottom of a hole and stay there. Let's go out and get torches before going further."

I started to climb back over the slick in-

cline, and although it was not over fifteen feet from the bottom to the top, I failed to make it. If I made a little headway, I immediately slipped back. At first we laughed, and Balser tried the ascent; but after we had each failed many times, we began to be frightened. The incline was much steeper than we had supposed it to be.

We struggled frantically in our effort to climb out, and soon we were almost exhausted by excitement, fear, and exertion. Trembling and drenched with perspiration, we stood at the foot of the incline, and in our hearts we cursed the treasure that had led us into this trouble. For a time we could hardly speak. The obstacle to be overcome was so small, but the task of overcoming it was so great, that we were in despair. The thought of dying there, fifteen feet from light and life, was maddening.

Suddenly Balser began to laugh and I thought he was going mad. I took his hand to comfort him, and he said: —

"Tom Andy Bill, I s'pose that two such fools as you and I are were never before turned loose upon the world."

"I hope you're right," said I; "it would

be a terrible infliction on the world if there were many like us, for we certainly were great fools to get ourselves into this scrape."

Balser laughed again and said: "Nonsense, Tom Andy Bill, we're all right. We'll be out of here in a minute. Listen to my plan. I say we are fools because we had not thought of it before. It is not more than twelve or fifteen feet to the top of this inclined rock. I'll start up. You push my feet till I get a hold on the dry rock above. Then I'll turn around, head down, and pull you out."

"Good," said I. "Balser, you're no fool, whatever I am. I should have rotted here before thinking of your plan."

Our spirits went up at once, and we ceased to find any fault with the treasure for having brought us to the cave.

Balser stretched himself in the chute, and I, bracing my feet upon the floor below, pushed him upward. All went well for a time, and we thought we should soon be out of our difficulty; but when we were both stretched at full length upon the slippery inclined rock, we stopped in our ascent. Balser could not reach the dry rock at the top, therefore he could not draw himself up.

After a terrific struggle of five minutes, I could hold him no longer. I took my hands from his feet, and we both slid back into the pool of water. Then we *were* in trouble. I would have given anything to be a girl for five minutes; I wanted to cry.

We were so tired that we stepped back from the mouth of the chute, feeling our way cautiously as we went, and sat down on the dry rock floor a short distance away from the pool of water. After sitting there for a few minutes, I happened to place my hand on the floor and found that it was covered with a fine gritty sand. Then it was that *I* conceived a brilliant idea.

"There's sand on the floor, Balser," said I.

"Yes," he answered dolefully; "I don't care if it's gold-dust. What I want is to get out of this awful place; and if I once get out, I wouldn't come back for all the wealth of the world."

"The sand is more valuable to us than gold-dust," I said. "We'll sprinkle it over the slippery rock, and then we'll be able to go up easily enough."

No sooner had I spoken than Balser was

filling his cap with the sand. I did likewise, but when we began to toss it on the rock, I suggested: —

"Let us try to wipe some of the moisture from the rock, and then we'll sprinkle on the sand."

I took off my jacket and proceeded to dry the rock with it as well as I could, and then we sprinkled it with sand. After that we easily climbed out, as thankful a pair of boys as lived in all the world.

We hurried to the outer opening, and although the sunlight almost blinded us, it looked so sweet, tasted so sweet, and smelled so sweet that we wanted to hug it to our breasts and kiss it.

"No more gold for me," said Balser.

"Nor for me," I answered. "I don't want anything better than pelts. I'm going home, and any man that wants the treasure may have it if he can get it."

We were very tired, and Balser looked as though he had been through an attack of sickness. After resting awhile, we built a fire and ate our supper.

We did not care to start back home at nightfall, so we concluded to sleep under the

rock one more night and make an early start in the morning.

When we turned in, I got to thinking of home and soon became so homesick that I wanted to cry.

After two or three efforts to speak, I said, "I wonder what mother is doing at home."

"Oh, don't!" cried Balser. "I'd give Wyandotte's treasure, if I had it right now, to see mother. Oh! wouldn't I just kiss her?"

Despite my efforts, tears began to come to my eyes, and I tried to whistle. I might as well have tried to thunder.

"I don't care who knows I want to cry," sobbed Balser.

"Neither do I," I replied, and after that I suppose we both shed a few tears and were very much comforted. Women don't know what a luxurious privilege they enjoy. Our nerves were overwrought by the terrible experience we had undergone, and we had never before been so long, or so far, away from home. Our nervous condition made the homesickness all the harder to bear; but the boy of sixteen who cannot cry because he wants to see his mother is lacking in the stuff that

goes to make the right kind of a man. Sleep soon overcame us, and by morning we were feeling much better.

While we were eating breakfast, Balser remarked: —

"It *does* seem a shame, Tom Andy Bill, to go away without that gold when we almost have it in our hands. We are over the worst of the difficulties. We have solved the problem of the chute. But I have a plan that will make the ascent of that slippery rock as simple as a, b, c. We'll cut a pole eighteen or twenty feet long, and by the help of the pole we can climb in and out without any trouble."

I was delighted with the suggestion, and we at once went to the top of the hill with our hatchet, where we felled a small tree that answered our purpose. First I tried the descent of the chute and, by the help of the pole, easily climbed out. That problem settled, we prepared torches and started for the treasure in real earnest.

After we had passed the chute, we lighted our torches from fire we had taken in with us and illumined the entire chamber. All that day we spent in examining the cave, but

no sign of a possible hiding place for the treasure chests could be found. The next day we found other chambers of the cavern and carefully examined them.

Toward the end of the second day's search we discovered a passageway leading to a very large cavern. When we entered it, we could not see the ceiling by the light of our torches, but we could distinctly see the lower ends of great hanging pillars, called stalactites, that hung down to within fifteen or twenty feet of the floor. Springing from the floor to meet these hanging columns were others varying in height from two to fifteen feet. It was all like a scene from fairyland, for the rock was of white crystal, and glistened like millions of diamonds in the light of our torches.

Leading from and through this marvellous chamber were many corridors that wound in and out among the columns like the paths of a labyrinth. Frequently we thought we were lost, and for fear that catastrophe might happen, we blazed our path by smoking the rocks with our torches, so that we should be able to find our way out again.

After we had admired the wonderful scene,

we began a careful examination of the chamber and of all the corridors and caves opening into it. Not a square foot of floor did we leave unexamined; not a spot where the treasure could possibly be hidden did we fail to investigate. We found no openings nor chamber other than those we had entered and inspected, and after a hard day's work we gave up the search. Balser looked at his watch and said it was five o'clock.

"There's no treasure here," said he, regretfully, "but I am glad we came. We have been rewarded for our trouble by the sight of this wonderful cave."

"I believe we have examined every square foot of it," I answered. "There are no more caves to be conquered. I think there is not a spot in all these rooms that we have not gone over a dozen times. This is not Wyandotte's cave, or he lied about the treasure. The old fellow was drunk when he told us the story."

"I don't believe it is his cave," said Balser. "We'll find the right cave one of these days, and we'll get the treasure, Tom Andy Bill, just as sure as my name is Balser."

"Well," said I, for perhaps the hundredth

time, "I hope you're right, but we have no more business here, so let us get out and go home."

We took up our smoke trail and had no difficulty in finding our way back to the exit from the room we had christened "The Marble Chamber." Just as we stooped to pass under the low arch of the doorway, we heard back of us, in the darkness, a whirring noise not unlike that made by a strong wind blowing through a leafless forest. The noise increased rapidly and was most uncanny in its effect. It frightened us, but before we could learn the cause, we were struck from behind as if by a shower of small stones. Our torches were dashed from our hands and we were thrown to the ground. Our lights were instantly extinguished, and the noise continued for perhaps thirty seconds.

After it had ceased and as we lay upon the floor of the cavern, Balser said: —

"Bats! I saw them by thousands clinging to the roofs and walls of the cave."

He was right. Thousands of bats congregated in the cave during the daylight and flew out in great flocks when evening approached. The explanation was simple

enough, but the result was far from simple for Balser and me. For the first time in my life I realized what total darkness meant.

We sat where we had fallen, and every few minutes the whirring noise passed over us. It seemed that we had suddenly dropped from heaven into a terrible inferno. After a short time the noise ceased, and we knew that the bats had all gone out for the night. We supposed that it was dark outside. We rose to our feet and began to grope around to find, if possible, the passageway leading out. Of course our smoke trail was of no use to us in the dark. Life of me, how black it was!

We could not find the outgoing corridor. Several times we thought we had found it, but we invariably came up against a stone wall. We had been in great trouble at the lower end of the slippery chute, but now we were in utter despair. Our heads got many a hard bump, and we learned the lesson to "make haste slowly." We kept a firm grasp on each other's hands, for had we become separated we might not have been able to get together again. The reverberating echoes of our voices were misleading, and

we should have had little chance of finding each other by calling out, were we once parted.

I gripped Balser's hand so hard that he cried out in pain, but you never saw two boys stick closer together than we did in the black heart of that awful rock. If we must die, we would die together, and I tell you, it looked very much as though that fate were in store for us.

After bruising ourselves in every bone and muscle, we gave up the fruitless search, sat down on the floor to rest, and tried to compose ourselves. We had been in the cave a long while and were very tired.

"How long do you suppose we have been here since the torches went out?" asked Balser.

"I'm blest if I know," I answered, "but it has surely been eight or ten hours. Perhaps it has been more."

We lay down and tried to sleep. I remember that we lay very close together, and while we were trying to go to sleep, Balser said: —

"You won't leave me, will you, Tom Andy Bill?"

And I said, "No, and you won't leave me, will you, Balser?"

He grasped my hand in answer, and shutting our eyes we again tried to sleep. We lay on the floor for a long while, but sleep would not come to us. We had no way of knowing the time, but we supposed that we had rested several hours when the whirring noise that had preceded and accompanied our trouble again approached.

"Just think of it, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser, "the bats are going out again. It is twenty-four hours since they knocked us down. It seems like a month. I'm almost choked with thirst, and I'm so hungry that I'm weak."

I will not try to describe the horror of that time. All the suffering of my life cannot be compared with what I endured in the cave.

"My legs are cramped, and I am going to move about," said Balser.

Then we got up and groped about the cavern for exercise. We had lost nearly all hope. After wandering about the chamber for a long time, we lay down again, and finally sleep came from sheer exhaustion. Of course we did not know how long we slept, but on awakening, we again heard the whirring noise over our heads.

"Good Lord! The bats are going out again for the night!" said Balser. "We have been here forty-eight hours. At first I was afraid we *would* die, but now I am afraid we will *not*."

Again we rose and groped our way about the room. After what seemed a long while, we rested again, and after a weary waiting we once more heard the whirring noise. We had lost all trace of time, but judging by the flight of the bats, we supposed that we had passed three days in the cave.

We felt so weak for lack of food and sleep that we could hardly walk. At periods of every few hours, as we supposed, we moved about in the darkness for exercise.

At last, in one of these hopeless wanderings, we suddenly caught a faint glimmer of light. Ah, the joy of it! In five minutes' time we were climbing through the slippery chute, and within two minutes more we were out in the glad daylight. The gloaming was just turning to night, but compared to the darkness of the cave, we felt as if we were looking into the full glare of the midday sun.

"I must have water," said Balser, who was hoarse from weakness and thirst.

While he was drinking I mechanically drew out my watch and looked at it.

"Say, Balser, my watch is still running," said I, "and I haven't wound it since we went into the cave."

He drew his watch from his pocket and said: "So is mine. Surely it could not have kept going for three days, and I didn't once think of it in the cave."

Then we looked at each other and began to laugh, for it was only seven o'clock, and we had been lost in the cave just two hours. I wasn't nearly as hungry or thirsty or weak when I found how we had been fooled regarding the time spent in the cave.

"I was actually so weak from hunger and thirst," said Balser, "that I could hardly stand alone."

"Don't say a word," said I.

Well, we were mighty glad to get out, but two boys more thoroughly disgusted with themselves than Balser Brent and Tom Andy Bill Addison didn't live at that particular moment on the face of the earth.

We had no hope of finding Wyandotte's treasure in *that* cave, so we left next morning and made our way back to Cincinnati,

where we arrived in due time, wiser if not richer boys than when we left.

"I'll tell you about the trip home to-morrow evening if I don't go to church," said Uncle Tom Andy Bill.

"You'll tell us, too, about the girl you found, won't you?" asked Mab.

"Yes, I'll tell you about her, too."

CHAPTER IX

THE ROBBERS IN THE SWAMP

NEXT evening Mab settled herself down very close to our story-teller and said: —

"Well, Uncle Tom, I'm glad you didn't go to church to-night, but I hope no one will knock you down for not going."

A murmur of laughter started over the audience, but Uncle Tom Andy Bill raised his hand warningly, and it was smothered. No one should laugh at Mab when she was in earnest. The baby girl had a keen sense of humor, but it never found expression save in words that were literally true. Neither did she expect anything but the exact truth from others. The result was that Uncle Tom Andy Bill and a great many very good and discerning persons worshipped at her little shrine. After she had settled herself in her tiny chair, and had spread her little skirts contentedly, she looked up to Uncle Tom Andy Bill and said: —

"Now." That word was the tinkling bell that raised the curtain, and Uncle Tom Andy Bill began.

THE STORY

The morning after Balser and I reached Cincinnati we received our money in a canvas shot-bag from the tavern keeper, placed it in a flour-sack along with the presents for the folks at home, hitched up the horses, and started for Blue River. The wagon was light, and the horses having had a long rest in the stable, we travelled homeward at a brisk rate.

No adventure befell us until the second evening, when we were about halfway home. At the rate we travelled, we should have been home on the evening of the second day, and should have missed the adventure, the results of which have affected my life even down to this present moment, had we not stopped at a little town called Napoleon to witness a circus performance. But we did stop, and that small incident, as I have told you, has colored my whole life.

The circus threw us one day behind, and at the end of the second day we drew up in a

drizzling rain in front of an old, rambling, two-story brick house that looked as if it had been deserted by mankind and appropriated by a family of ghosts. Thinking the house was unoccupied, we concluded to camp in it for the night; but after looking at it for a moment, it seemed so lonesome and "haunted like" that we were about to drive on, when an old woman came to the door and said: —

"'Light, strangers. 'Light and come in! You're very welcome, and it's going to be a bad night. It's ten miles to the nearest house."

"Let us go in and stay for the night," suggested Balser.

"I'm agreed," said I, so we stopped.

While we were unhitching the horses, a young girl perhaps fourteen years old came out and proceeded to help us. Balser and I gazed at her in wonder. Despite the coarse rags that served her as clothing, despite her unwashed face and unkempt hair, she was beautiful beyond description. Her hair was like a black sunlit cloud tossed by the caressing wind. Her great violet eyes, fringed by long black lashes and arched by pencilled eyebrows, fairly shone with the lustre of health

and the glow of her soul. Her exquisite face, with its dark, rosy complexion, was of a type frequently met with under the blue skies of Italy, but seldom found in this cold clime.

When the horses were unhitched, the girl led one of them to the stable, and I followed, leading the other.

"Put your horse in that stall," she said, "and I'll put this one here."

I answered like a yokel, "Yes, ma'am."

"Shall I give them corn?" she asked, and again I said, "Yes, ma'am."

"They'll want water, I suppose," she suggested. Again I responded brilliantly, "Yes, ma'am."

"There's a bucket just outside the door, and the pump is at the end of the barn. You get the water and I'll get the corn. Six ears apiece?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," said I.

When I returned with the water, she was waiting to feed the horses. While they were drinking I stood by her side, trying very hard to think of something to say, but I failed, and grew more and more embarrassed as the silence continued. The girl was as composed as the horses. After a long silence, she said: —

"You needn't call me ma'am. I'm just Mab." She smiled, and Tom Andy Bill, though very young, got his life sentence then and there.

The girl and I talked for a while at the barn. We didn't say much, but little as it was, I don't intend to tell you about it. She had the knack of making others feel easy in her presence, and by the time we got to the house, I had told her my name and the names of all my relatives, where I lived, where we had been, and all I knew that my confusion would permit me to recall. In fact, we were quite well acquainted.

When we entered the house, we found, besides the old woman, an old man and two other men who might have been any age from forty to sixty. The old woman offered chairs and Balser and I sat down. The old man said "Howdy?" but the other men arose and left the room without speaking.

Soon after the two men had left, the old man turned to me and said: —

"B'en to Cincinnati, have ye?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Like as not ye took a load o' furs down about four weeks ago."

I assented, and the old man continued: —

"Seed ye drive by and 'lowed ye'd be back by and by."

We did not answer, and after a brief silence the old man again commenced his catechism:

"I 'low ye got a good bit o' money fer the furs. I seed ye had a fine load of 'em."

"Yes," answered outspoken Balser, "we got three hundred and forty dollars in gold."

I did not know why I was sorry that Balser had spoken of our gold, but I was.

"Hope ye didn't leave the gold in any o' them shaky Cincinnati banks," said the old man.

"Indeed, we did not," returned Balser. "We have it with us," and he produced the shot-bag from the flour-sack.

When Balser said, "We have it with us," the girl sprang to her feet as if startled, and I noticed an anxious, alarmed expression on her face. It did not occur to me that these old people could be robbers; therefore the girl's curious little action passed unnoticed, though I recalled it afterward. After Balser's outspoken reference to the gold, the old man lapsed into silence, and in a few minutes the old woman said: —

"Come, Mab, let's git supper. I expect these gentlemen are hungry."

Mab followed the old woman into the kitchen and shut the door. In a minute or two I heard the woman speaking angrily to the girl, and soon afterward I saw Mab galloping away on the Michigan Road astride a horse. In the course of half an hour we were called out to supper, and when we had finished, night had almost fallen. A storm was blowing up from the southwest, and the dim light of the gloaming was rapidly giving place to inky darkness. The wind began to sigh ominously, and soon the rainfall became heavier. At eight o'clock the old man went to bed, and at half-past eight the old woman said: —

"I 'low you're tired and want to sleep."

She was right, and we took kindly to her suggestion.

"Just go up them steps," she said, "and go into the room on the left-hand side. I expect ye'll want an early breakfast so's to get an early start."

We told her that we wished to get off as early as possible, and then we went upstairs to bed, Balser carrying the flour-sack

into which we had put the gold, and I leading the way with an old tallow dip that gave about as much illumination as two lightning bugs.

After supper I had watched for the girl, though I had not seen her.

There was one window in our room from which two or three panes of glass were lacking, and immediately outside the window stood a walnut tree whose branches grew very close to the house. Although we were tired, we did not go to sleep at once, but lay awake listening to the drizzling rain, and receiving a splash now and then through the half-glazed window.

An hour or two passed tediously, during which I slept as they say a weasel sleeps, with one eye open. Balser was asleep and I was growing drowsy when I heard the splash of horse's hoofs in the road, and was instantly wide awake. Then I heard the bars of the barnyard fall and soon the barn door opened. In a minute or two it closed. Then the door of the kitchen opened and closed, and I knew the girl had returned. I could not help wondering why she had been out in the storm at that hour of the

night, but I had grown too sleepy to think much about anything.

Soon after the kitchen door had opened and closed, I fell into a light sleep, but I was immediately awakened by a soft footfall on the stairway, as if some one were approaching our door stealthily in bare feet. Before I was fully awake the door of our room opened noiselessly, and a voice which I at once recognized as Mab's, whispered: —

"Don't speak."

She quickly ran over to our bed and placed her lips close to my ear. Her warm breath against my cheek was like an electric shock, but she gave me no time to enjoy the pleasure of it.

In a hurried whisper, she said: "Four armed men will be here in less than five minutes to take your gold. You must pretend to sleep. If they know you are awake, they will kill you and your friend, and will bury you in the quagmire in the swamp. They have often buried men alive there. It has no bottom, and the bodies never come up if once they sink. If the men learn that you are awake, your friends will never know your fate."

"Can we escape?" I whispered.

"No, no!" she answered. "If you try, they will overtake you and kill you. But even if you had any chance of escaping, there is not time to try. There they come up the stairs. Listen. Go to sleep and I'll get under the bed."

The girl had hardly disappeared under the bed when the door opened and four men, one of whom bore a tallow dip, entered the room. The man with the dip approached our bed. My eyes were closed, but I could distinguish the light through my eyelids. I was desperately afraid that Balser would awaken. Their visit was short. In less than half a minute they were gone, and I knew that our precious bag of gold had gone with them. I sat up in the bed and put my feet over the side.

"Sh!! Lie down!" whispered the girl.

I lay down again, for I felt that Mab was our friend, and I was sure that she knew what was best for us. Soon I heard a door shut downstairs, and then the girl came out from her hiding-place. Again she put her lips to my ear, and said:—

"Make no disturbance, or you will never leave here alive. To-morrow the old man

and the old woman will pretend to be in great trouble because robbers broke into the house and stole money from their guests. The old woman will tell you that her money also was stolen. If you seem to agree with her, you will be allowed to leave in safety. If you let her think that you suspect her and the old man, you will die before noon. Don't waken your friend, but let him think you were asleep when the gold was stolen, and encourage him to believe that the old man and the old woman know nothing of it. Don't tell him what I have told you. I would not trust him, but I do trust you."

Then a wonderful thing happened. She kissed me on the forehead, and glided from the room as noiselessly as a shadow.

Thoughts of her drove all remembrance of the gold from my mind, and I lay in a sort of ecstasy, dreaming open-eyed about her. In the midst of my longing to see her again, she returned. Again she placed her lips to my ear, and whispered: —

"I know you are brave. If you want to recover your gold, I'll take you to the house of the robbers in the swamp. We will risk

our lives, but I'll go with you if you wish to try it."

"I do wish to try," said I, seizing her hand.

"When you hear an owl hooting under your window, come out to the barn and bring your friend. Climb out through the window and down the walnut tree."

Again she left the room, and I awakened Balser. I briefly told him in a whisper what had happened, and we at once rose and dressed. We lifted the window, and after waiting a long time for the signal, an owl hooted; then we climbed to the ground by way of the walnut tree. We found the girl waiting for us, and we all went to the barn. When she felt safe in speaking, she said in low tones: —

"I notified the robbers that you were here and that you had gold. Old Polly made me do it. They would have killed me if I had refused, so I rode away at supper time, and it was I who brought them upon you. But I don't care what they do; I would rather die than have this on my soul. I will take you to the house in the swamp and show you where the gold is hidden. You can take it,

and I will lead you out from the swamp. They will know I helped you, and I will tell them that I did. Then they'll kill me, but I want to die anyway."

She did not wait for an answer, but entered the barn and presently came out leading a horse.

"You, Tom Andy Bill, ride behind me," she said. "We will get the gold. Let your friend wait with your two horses just inside the woods a little way up the road. You will need fresh horses when we return."

Balser objected to being left behind and insisted on going with Mab and me.

"We have but three horses — this one and your two," said the girl. "If you ride one of your horses, you will have but one fresh one for a hard, long ride when we come back, and I tell you, you will need two, and need them badly. You don't know these men. They are The Wolves. They're not men, they're devils." Then she grew angry and continued: "You listen to me and do as I say. I'm giving my life to undo the wrong I did, and — and I tell you, you must do as I say, or I'll throw my life away for nothing!"

She lowered the bars, put one foot on a

rail of the fence, sprang to the horse's back, leaned down toward me, and whispered: —

"Get up behind me, Tom Andy Bill."

I obeyed, and the next instant we were slowly passing the house, going eastward toward the swamp. She guided the horse to the sod by the roadside to avoid the noise of his hoofs on the gravel roadway. When we were a short distance from the house, she struck the horse with her heels, and away we went at full gallop.

Presently I said: "Let me ride in front and you behind. I'm ashamed to ride this way."

"You don't know the road," was her only reply.

At times she allowed the horse to rest, but she kept up a rapid gait for the greater part of half an hour. Then she left the road and turned into a black forest. After entering the woods we were compelled to travel in a walk, and the panting horse was not sorry. How the girl kept the path I have never known, for the night was so dark that I could not see even the back of her head, though her soft hair was constantly lashing me in the face.

Soon I heard the splashing of our horse's hoofs in the water, and I knew we were entering the swamp. After a little while the girl slid from the horse and led it. I was too much of a man to ride while the girl was wading through the swamp, leading the horse, so I slid off and came with a splash to the ground.

"Do you want to ruin us?" she whispered. "These trees have ears. The path through the swamp is narrow, and on each side there is a bottomless quagmire."

She took my hand, and we proceeded on our perilous journey. In ordinary circumstances I should have been frightened, for I never was very brave; but the girl was so fearless that she gave me courage.

After we had been wading through the swamp perhaps fifteen minutes, she said:

"We'll soon be on the island. Don't speak above a whisper, and a low whisper at that. Do exactly as I say and don't doubt me."

When we reached the dry land, she tied the horse and took my hand. The forest was very dense, and the darkness was like a patch of black paint. When she had hitched the horse she took my hand, and whispered:—

"The house is close by. All the doors and windows are of thick oak and are fastened by bars inside. If the night was warm, a window might be open, and I might climb in and get the gold; but the storm has made it cool, and I am afraid the house will be locked and barred. If it is, I'll arouse them and take the men away from the house on some excuse while you are hiding.

"When I take the men to the barn," she continued, "you go in the house by the front door; keep straight ahead till you reach the stairs; go up the steps and turn in at the door to your right. In the opposite right-hand corner of the room there is a large iron-bound oak chest. Near it is Granny Wolf's bed, and under her pillow is the key to the chest. The gold is in the chest. The powder, too, is kept there to protect it from rats. You will awaken Granny, for she sleeps like a weasel, but she is a little deaf and can't distinguish voices well. So the best thing you can do is to shake her, and tell her that you are Con, and that you want to get some powder. Tell her that Mab has come back with news of another rich haul down at Polly's.

"You get the gold, lock the chest, and give Granny the key. Then you go back to where we left the horse, and I'll meet you there soon as I can. Don't try to go through the swamp without me, or you will surely fall into the quagmire. I'll come if I live. If The Wolves discover the trick I have played them, we will both die; that is certain. There are five men and two women. Now, you understand. When the men leave the house with me, you go in at the front door. Go straight ahead to the stairs, and when you get to the top, enter the door at the right, and get the gold as I have told you. Now let's go to the house and try to get in without awakening them."

Two hundred steps brought us to the house. While we were going there, Mab called my attention to the path, so that I should be able to find my way back to the horse. When we reached the house, we walked around it, trying each window shutter in the hope of finding one unlocked. We had made the entire circuit, and were at the front door, when we heard a voice from an upper window call out: —

"Who's there? Answer quick, or I'll shoot!"

"It's Mab!" cried the girl. At the same moment she pushed me back toward a bush that grew by the doorstep, and I, taking the hint, crept under the branches. I confess that I was terribly frightened. You must remember I was only a boy of sixteen. The girl was two or three years younger than I, but, in a real emergency, a woman is usually braver than a man. When the man called from the window, the girl answered in a voice without a tremor: —

"It's Mab! Are you all dead in there? I've been trying for ten minutes to wake you up. You're a pretty lot of thieves to keep watch. The lawyers" (meaning the officers of the law) "might have burned the house about your ears, and you wouldn't have known the difference. I'm getting tired of this. I've made two trips over here in the rain, and now you keep me waiting out here all night, soaking wet, while you snooze away like 'possums. It's the last time I'll ever come to tell you about a haul."

"Don't grumble, Mab; I'll let you in," answered the voice from above.

She stepped to the front door and, as she passed me, she touched me, saying, "Lie

still." In a moment I heard the clanking of chains and the rumbling of bars within, and immediately afterward the door opened.

"What is it, Mab?" asked the man.

The girl stood at the door and I heard her say: —

"There's a load of groceries, and cloth, and everything, Polly says, down at the house. They came in soon after you left."

"How many men are there?" asked one of The Wolves.

"There are three men and a boy, and all are asleep," answered Mab. "Polly drugged them. They have two fine horses, and six guns, and lots of ammunition, Polly says. Besides, Polly says she thinks they have some money."

"Is their stuff in the house?" asked one of the men.

"No," answered Mab; "they left everything in the wagon at the barn, so you needn't go into the house to get the plunder. Polly says for you just to hitch the horses to the wagon and pull out with it. Polly talked to the men while they were eating supper."

"What time did they come?" asked a woman who had joined the men at the door.

"About twelve o'clock, I reckon," answered Mab. "They got us up in the middle of the night to feed them. Polly says she thinks they're drugged all right, but she says for all of you to come over. The three men and the two boys that are already there might wake up and give you an ugly fight if there are only two or three of you, so Polly says for all of you to come well armed, and to hurry. It must be almost two o'clock now."

By the time the girl had finished telling her story, the other men of the house had joined her at the front door. Immediately I heard a great bustle within the house, and soon the girl came out, with five men following her.

"Are you going to the stable to get the horses?" she asked.

"Yes. Where's yourn?" answered one of the men.

"Oh, I've got him right down here. I'll go on ahead, and if anything's wrong when I get to the house, I'll warn you," answered the girl.

A woman went to the barn with the men, and when they were out of sight, I knew that Granny was alone upstairs; so I, frightened

nearly to death, but acting on bravery borrowed from the girl, boldly went in at the front door, felt my way to the stairs, and noiselessly went up. After groping about, I found the door to the right and entered.

"What do you want?" asked Granny from her bed.

"It's Con," said I, hoarsely. "I want some powder. There's a great haul down at Polly's. Mab brought the word just now."

"Yes, I heard all about it. Sally told me. Here's the key," answered Granny Wolf.

I took the key from her hand after groping about in the dark for it, and then tried to find the chest. Of course I got into the wrong corner, and when I found that I had lost my way in the room, my heart beat so violently that I feared even the deaf old Granny might hear it. After a little time she asked: —

"What on earth are you doing over in that corner? Lost in the dark?"

"Yes," I answered. "Where's the light?"

"Light?" screamed the old hag, angrily. "It will be morning before you get the powder if you wait to strike a light from

the tinder box this damp night! Give me the key!"

I heard her getting out of bed, and I thought my day — or my night — had come.

"Where are ye?" she asked.

"Here," I answered.

She found me and I gave her the key. I heard her unlock the chest, and I heard the lid fall back against the wall.

"How many horns do ye want?" she asked.

"I'll get them," I answered.

I collided with her as she was going back to bed, but I immediately found the chest. It was perhaps three and a half feet high. I leaned over and felt among the contents for our precious bag. My hand came in contact with all manner of things. There were boxes, bundles, bags, and powder-horns by the score. Everything seemed to be in the chest but our bag of gold. I was almost ready to run away without it, when my hand found a sack tied about the neck with a string. It was much too small for our flour-sack, but it seemed too large and heavy for our gold bag. However, I grasped the puckered end, lifted it out of the chest,

slammed the lid, turned the key, gave it to Granny, and hurried away as fast as my legs would carry me. My life, but I was glad to get out of that front door!

How I found my way back to the horse, I don't know. Fright must have sharpened my instinct, and I found the horse, I suppose, as a lost dog finds its way home without knowing how it does it. When I got back to where the horse was standing, my teeth were chattering so that I thought surely I should waken the entire swamp. My knees smote together, and for a time I had to cling to the horse for support. I had used up all the courage I had borrowed from the girl, and she was not there to lend me more.

I have always suffered more or less from cowardice, but that, I believe, was the worst attack I ever had. You see there was no one to witness my weakness, and you have no idea how much the desire to show off and the fear of ridicule has to do with a man's bravery when it comes to action. Many a man who is a coward at heart will drive himself to do a brave deed in the presence of others. That night I was brave only when

the girl was by my side. A touch from her hand strengthened my nerves, and in the light of her eyes I could have fought a thousand dragons.

I had waited perhaps five minutes beside the horse — and they were long ones, you may be sure — when I heard the tramping of horses' hoofs and the voices of men approaching from the direction of the house. If my knees had shaken and my teeth chattered before, imagine, if you can, the quaking and the clatter that ensued when the men passed on horseback within twenty feet of me.

"Where's Mab?" I heard one of them ask.

"I reckon she's gone ahead," answered another. A moment later I heard the splashing of their horses' hoofs in the swamp.

When I saw the men pass ahead of us, I thought surely Mab and I were lost, and I trembled for Balser's safety. He would be waiting in the woods beyond the house, near the road, and I feared he might return to the barn when we failed to show up. The men were now between Balser and me, and

how I was to pass them and reach him, I did not know.

While I was wondering and trembling, the girl came up to me.

"We'll wait here a few minutes and then we'll follow them," she said, coming close to me and whispering.

The first thing I did after she came to me was to borrow some of her inexhaustible fund of courage. I negotiated a big loan, but she seemed to have all of hers left after supplying me. Immediately I became as brave as a lion. I feared nothing.

"Did you get the gold?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered, holding the sack out toward her.

"You're the bravest boy I ever knew," she said, "and I hope you will forgive me for setting The Wolves upon you. I've done my best to right the wrong, and when they learn of the trick I have played them, they will kill me. They won't care so much about the loss of the gold, but, you see, I have betrayed the secret of their den. They have killed three women and one man that I know of, because they feared they might betray the secret of the swamp to the

lawyers. They'll bury me alive in the quagmire, but I don't care if they do. I want to die. I can't live here as the slave of these murderous thieves a day longer."

"You shall not stay here. You shall go with me," I answered, grasping her hand.

"You're crazy," she replied, snatching her hand from mine and unhitching the horse. She threw the rein over the horse's head and came back to me.

"Here, take my foot and give me a lift," she said, holding up her foot. I lifted her to the horse, and grasping her by the hand, sprang up behind her; then she turned the horse's head and soon we entered the swamp.

The night was frightfully dark and rain was falling in a heavy drizzle. Ten minutes after we entered the swamp, the girl suddenly drew rein and cried, "Whoa!" The horse stopped and I at once realized that it was sinking. For the last few steps I had not heard the splash of the horse's hoofs in the water, and the awful truth flashed across my mind that the girl had missed the path.

"Good Lord!" she exclaimed, in a voice of horror, "we're on the edge of the quagmire.

Fall off the horse! Don't jump off! Fall on your side or on your back, and don't try to stand on your feet or you'll be lost! You'll sink in the mud!"

She fell off the horse and I followed her lead.

"Do as I do," she said, and I watched her very closely, you may be sure. She lay full length in the mud, and began rolling toward the path. Instinct prompted me to try to get on my feet, but one effort satisfied me. I thought I was gone. I immediately lay down again on my back in the mud, and with great difficulty extricated my feet. When I had done so, I began to roll toward the girl. Twice I thought I should have to abandon my bag of gold or sink, but I clung to it, and after rolling over three or four times, I felt the strong grasp of this wonderful girl's hand.

"Stand up!" she said. "You are safe."

I arose and stood knee-deep in mud, though my feet were on solid ground.

"Here is the path," she said, leading me toward it.

"Let us try to save the horse," I suggested.

"No power on earth can save him," she

answered. "Poor fellow! But let's not stay to see his struggles. Come on!"

She climbed to the path, and we continued our awful journey on foot. As we walked along, she took my hand and said, laughing softly:—

"You clung to the gold. I believe you would have gone down rather than lose it."

"No, I clung to it because I knew I could save it," I answered.

"It's not worth a life," she returned, "though some lives are not worth very much. Mine isn't. I'll be with the horse in the quagmire before sun-up. I'll save The Wolves the trouble of throwing me in. When I see that you're safe, I'll go back and jump in."

"You will go with me," I answered.

"No, no!" she replied. "You don't know what you are saying. You don't know the evil you would bring upon yourself and your folks. Besides, I don't fear death. I want to die. I once heard a man say there was a place across the ocean where people took mud baths for rheumatism. Well, you see, I have the rheumatism, and I want to cure it."

She laughed softly, dropped my hand, and took my arm. Her laughter in the face of death fascinated me, and I could hardly speak. I had never before known a human heart of that quality.

I was covered with mud, and she, too, was plastered from head to heels.

"If any one were to see us now," she said, again laughing softly, "they would think that we were Adam and Eve, and that the Lord hadn't finished us."

I was almost ready to weep, but she laughed softly now and then, and ploughed along through the mud and water as merrily as if she were going to a frolic. Once she started to sing, but checking herself, laughed and placed her mud-covered hand over her mouth to smother the song. Then she laughed outright, for she had covered her mouth with mud. I began to doubt my senses or hers. Surely these desperate men would kill her for betraying them, yet in the face of a frightful death, she laughed and wanted to sing.

God fills some hearts so full of joyousness and courage that death has no terrors for them. I walked beside this wonderful

girl, dumb with awe. If I had possessed a thousandth part of her bravery, I would have considered myself the most courageous man on earth, but a long acquaintance with mankind has taught me that bravery of that sort is only to be found in the heart of a woman.

After the girl smothered her song, we walked for ten or fifteen minutes, and at last came to the edge of the swamp. It did seem good to find my feet once more on solid earth. When we reached the Michigan Road, we started west as fast as we could go — that is, as fast as I could go. I almost ran to keep up with the rapid, swinging gait of the girl. Of course, we had lost a great deal of time in the quagmire, and I did not feel at all sure that we would not meet the disappointed robbers returning. When they learned of the deception that had been put upon them by Mab, they would at once start back in search of her.

I suggested this danger to the girl, and she answered:—

"Yes, I'm afraid they'll learn of the trick. I intended to follow close at their heels, and

just before we reached the house, I was going to jump from the horse and let you slip past and hurry on down to your friend, who is waiting with the fresh horses. But we have lost so much time that The Wolves will go into the house, and then they will come out and wait for us on the road. I'm sorry the field in front of the house is cleared. If it was woods, we could make a turn in among the trees and you could crawl by in the shadow."

"But you'll come, too," I said.

"No, no, I can't," she answered. "I'm not fit to touch your hand, but all your life I want you to remember the girl that gave her life to save you and to undo the wrong she had done."

"But you shall go with me. You shall not stay here to be killed by these brutes," said I, grasping her hand.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of them," she answered, with a low, soft laugh. "They can only kill me, and they'll do that quickly enough if I don't get back to the swamp ahead of them and kill myself. At any rate, I'll let them see that I do not fear them. Just as soon as you are safe, I will go to

them. I'll defy them. I'll scorn them, and I'll show them how to die laughing."

"I'll not leave this place without you," I answered, and the ring of determination was in my voice.

"Oh, yes, you will," she replied, coaxingly clinging to my arm. "You must. But listen! There they come on the gallop right down the road! They've learned the truth from old Polly. Lord, but she must be mad! Lie down in the ditch! Quick! Quick! I'll stand here and laugh at them! Good Lord, hear them swearing and cursing! Lie down, I tell you! Quick! quick, or you're lost! Lie down in the ditch!"

The Wolves were not a hundred yards from us.

"I'll stand till you lie down," I answered, and she knew I meant what I said.

She fell in the ditch by the roadside so suddenly that I thought she had been struck down. The next second I was stretched in the mud alongside of her, and ten seconds later The Wolves had come up to us. We were half covered with mud and water, and when the robbers galloped furiously by, we were as safe from detection as were the frogs

we had disturbed. My life, how The Wolves did curse and blaspheme! We heard them swearing vengeance against Mab with every wicked oath the evil mouth of man can speak. One fellow said: —

"We'll throw the little devil into the quagmire before morning."

Mab pinched me and laughed softly; but The Wolves had passed, and the girl's untimely merriment cost us nothing. Mab lifted her head to reconnoitre, and when she saw that the men had passed out of sight, we rose from the ditch and started down the road toward the house and Balser. When we approached the house, we saw by a dim light within that the front door was open.

"Some of The Wolves have stayed with Polly," said the girl. "You lie down in the gutter on the side of the road opposite the house and crawl past. When you get beyond the barn, you will be safe. Then you must run. When you get up out of the ditch, you hoot like an owl. Then I will know you are safe, and — and — that will be our good-by. When you're gone, I'll go into the house and wait for The Wolves to come after me."

"I'll go into the house with you," said I, "and I'll not go another step without you."

She grasped me by the arms and her voice trembled as she said, "Do you mean it, you — you fool?"

"As true as there is a God, I mean it," I answered. "If you have any doubt of the truth of what I say, enter the house and your doubts will soon vanish. If you're not going with me, there's no need to stand here longer in the rain. Let us go in and see Polly. I'll follow you. Which shall it be? Down the road to Balser and home, or into the house to Polly, The Wolves, and death? Choose quickly. We have no time to waste."

She was the braver, facing our danger in the swamp; but you see, after all, I was the stronger, and I beat down her will as the storm beats down the wheat. She paused for a moment, and said, "I choose you," betraying the first trace of emotion I had seen in her.

"Quick, quick!" I said. "I follow you in the ditch!"

"No, I follow you from now on till you tell me to stop," she answered.

I believed her, so I fell on my face in the ditch and began to crawl through the mud and water past the house. Mab said that we were having a baptism of mud. I would rather walk a hundred miles than crawl that hundred yards in the ditch. But all things must end, and we at last rose up from the mud and ran toward the woods where Balser was hiding with the horses. During all this time I had clung to the bag of gold.

We soon found Balser, and his first words were, "Did you get it?"

"Yes," said I, holding out the sack; "here it is."

The girl pointed her finger at the bag and said with a laugh: —

"If he hadn't got it, you would never have seen him. That precious bag almost cost him his life. But we had better be going or The Wolves will be upon us."

"We?" asked Balser in surprise. "Are you going?"

"She is," I answered, with emphasis.

Balser was inclined to remonstrate, and said, "But we —"

"There are no 'buts,'" I interrupted sharply. "She has saved our lives and has

recovered our gold, and she goes with us or I stay with her."

"There are but two horses," insisted Balser, "and we can't all ride."

"There will be one for you," I retorted, "and if that isn't enough, you may walk. The girl will ride behind me."

"But," said Balser, "the robbers will pursue us, and if you ride double, we can't travel fast enough to escape."

"I'll not go with you," said the girl.

"Very well. Then we'll go back to the house," said I. "If you'd only get it into your head for once and all that Tom Andy Bill Addison is not going home without you, you would save us a great deal of time."

The girl hesitated for a moment, and said softly, "I'll do whatever you tell me to do."

She had hardly finished speaking when I was on my horse's back, drawing her up behind me. When she was firmly seated on the horse, she cried out: —

"Oh, you've forgotten the gold! Where is the precious bag?"

She was right; I had forgotten the gold for the sake of the girl.

"It's on the ground there," I said to Balser. "Hand it to me."

"I'll carry it," said the girl. Balser handed her the bag, and I said to him: —

"Now you go ahead as fast as you wish, and we'll follow as fast as we can."

"No, I'll stay with you," he responded. "But why you want to take the girl with us is more than I can understand."

"You have no need to understand," I answered hotly. "You mind your own business and go your own way, and we'll take care of ourselves."

"I wouldn't leave you, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser, "if I knew that I would be full of bullets before sun-up." Then I was sorry that I had spoken angrily.

Within a minute or two we were once more on the Michigan Road, travelling toward home at a fine pace. We left our wagon and harness in exchange for the girl. Balser thought we had made a poor trade, but I was more than satisfied. Later on in life I — I — but that's no part of this story.

Twelve hours afterward Balser and two mud-covered, half-dead specimens of humanity alighted in front of my father's cabin on

Blue. Perhaps you think we were not glad to get home! Rapid explanations followed, and I was not quite sure that father and mother looked upon the girl and wagon trade with all the favor that it had found in my eyes; but after the mud had been washed from Mab's face, and after she had put on one of my sister's dresses, her beauty shone with such lustre that mother kissed her and gave her welcome.

When I told mother how Mab had saved our lives and our gold, the dear old mother kissed her again, and told Mab she should be another daughter in the house. A great deal of rapid talking followed, and our adventure with the robbers was told with all the exciting detail that I could furnish. The gold, of course, was mentioned frequently, and after a little time, father said:

"Where is the money, Tom Andy Bill?"

"There it is," said I, pointing to the sack on the table.

Father lifted the sack and said: "It's powerful heavy. Did you get it all for the furs?"

"Yes," I answered.

Then he untied the mouth of the sack and

poured out upon the table a great pile of beautiful — bullets.

Mab looked at the bullets; her big eyes opened in momentary surprise, and then she sent forth the merriest peal of laughter you ever heard.

"That bag of bullets nearly cost him his life," she said, and then she laughed again as if she thought it was very funny.

Balser said: "After all that we have gone through, this is awful! Bullets!"

"Don't say a word," said I, and to tell you the truth, it was hard for me to keep from laughing. You see, we had brought home the girl, and I thought that any sort of an exchange for her was a good trade.

Balser walked up and down the room for a moment, and then said with determination: —

"We'll go back to the swamp and get that gold — just as sure as I live, I'll do it. We'll have it within a month!"

"I hope you're right," said I.

We did go back with a posse of twenty-five deputy United States marshals. The government wanted The Wolves under an indictment against them for having robbed

the mails. Balser and I got our gold, we being able to identify it in the little sack in which we had received it. The deputy marshals captured a great deal of other gold and plunder, all of which was confiscated by the government.

Old Polly Wolf and the two women, captured in the swamp, were taken to Cincinnati, where Polly died in jail. Even though she was in jail, more than a hundred miles away from Blue River, she made trouble for me — trouble that resulted in the greatest grief I've ever known. One of The Wolves escaped, but the other four and old Daddy Wolf were hanged.

"Now, Mab, what do you think of that story?" asked Uncle Tom Andy Bill.

"I hope you'll not tell us any more like it," the baby girl answered, with a sigh. "I've almost shivered to death. Please take me on your lap, Uncle Tom Andy Bill, and warm me."

She climbed to his lap, and was soon warmed to sleep in his arms. He watched the child's face, and when the white, blue-veined lids were closed hard and fast, he

whispered huskily, "The girl was Mab's grandmother."

He bent his head, the waving silver locks mingled for a moment with Mab's curls as he kissed her baby lips, and then he drew a great sigh and carried his love of loves to bed.

CHAPTER X

A CHRISTMAS DINNER IN THE WOODS

THE following summer I bought the forty-acre tract of ground on which this house stands with my half of the money recovered from The Wolves. Father's farm was five miles south of here on Blue River. Balser bought the forty acres just north of this. Our first task was to build a log cabin. We built it on the little patch of raised ground close to the river, just below the barn. You have all played in it — you, and two or three other generations. It stands there yet, and will stand there as long as I live if I have my way concerning it.

After our cabin was built, Balser and I moved in and began clearing the land. It was a big undertaking for two boys seventeen years old, but we went at it with determination and made fair progress from the start. You have no idea of the magnitude of the task.

The ground was almost covered with great trees, many of them four feet in diameter, and between the trees flourished an undergrowth that would make the hair on a dog's back look thin by comparison. It was hard, slow work, but Balser and I took our time to it; and for the first three or four years we were contented with a small clearing.

The house nearest us down the river was Kaster's, three miles away. East of us, three or four miles distant, lived a few families; but they did not belong to the Blue River settlement and we did not know them.

In our cabin we had a floor made of logs smoothed with an adze on three sides and fitting snugly together. There was a ceiling overhead, under the clapboard roof, and of course we had a fine, large fireplace. Our cabin on Brandywine had been too well ventilated to protect us against a cold wind, but our new cabin on Blue was a defence against both the wind and the frost. We also built a log stable for Solomon, and when winter approached, we were prepared to live sumptuously. Mother gave me a cow, and late in the fall we brought up corn and oats

for feed. We had chickens also, and after we were fairly installed for the winter, we lived royally. We took school books and histories with us, and during the long winter evenings we acted as each other's teacher, and learned as much as if we had been in school.

When the cold weather set in, our principal work, of course, was trapping, though we also did a good bit of clearing. We didn't have many adventures worth narrating, but we spent a grand, happy, profitable winter. Oh, how happy we were! I see even the little events of that winter more distinctly than the great ones of recent years. We had built a long oak table that we placed in front of the fire, and the picture of two boys sitting at the table, ciphering by the firelight, is to me like a peep back into Paradise.

My, how cosey we were! And what a sweet zest life had for us! We had a real bed — a feather bed — over in the corner, and the walls of the cabin were covered with shelves, handy for storing our arms, ammunition, tools, provisions, and utensils. We had dishes, too, and pots and pans so numerous that they were often in our way.

Usually we went home every second Sunday; but as Christmas approached, we skipped a Sunday, intending to be home to meet Santa Claus.

A day or two before Christmas we killed a fat wild turkey, meaning to take it home for Christmas dinner. The weather at that time, I well remember, was beautiful. A heavy snow covered the ground, and it *was* cold. The trees about our cabin were festooned with garlands of crystal and snow, and the bright sun, loath to spoil the exquisite picture, was gentle in the way of heat, but mighty in brilliancy. We lived in a fairyland.

Christmas morning Balser and I awoke at the usual hour, but remembering the day, we concluded to make ourselves a present of a morning nap, so we rolled over and went to sleep again. We did not sleep long, however, for we were awakened by peals of laughter and cries of "Balser, Balser!" and "Tom Andy Bill!" outside our door. One voice I recognized instantly. It was Mab's, and you may safely wager everything you have that I got out of bed mighty quickly.

Our toilets were made while you could

count a hundred, and when I opened the door, there were my three sisters and Mab on two of my father's horses. Each girl carried a basket, and they were all laughing and screaming and calling for help. What a sight it was! Their cheeks were like June roses, their eyes danced and glistened like the happiest star in all the firmament, and the laughter from their lips was like the ripple of the merriest brook that ever sung a mountain roundelay.

When we came out they could not speak for laughing, and we were so glad to see them that we, too, began to laugh, and away we went, all together, with foolish persistency that must have delighted the heart of good old Santa Claus.

We stood there laughing until Mab said: "Take this basket, Tom Andy Bill. It has almost broken my arm."

I took the basket and turned to help her from the horse, but I was too late. She had jumped to the ground before I could turn around.

"Too slow, Tom Andy Bill," she whispered.

"Too quick, Mab," whispered I.

We took all the baskets from the girls, and when they had dismounted Balser and I led the horses to the stable. When we returned to the cabin we found the girls busily engaged getting breakfast. Of course they were all laughing and talking at once. When Balser and I joined them, we, too, began to laugh about nothing, and talk about less. We all talked at once, and although none of us seemed to know what the others were saying, we understood in a general way that we were trying to tell each other how glad we were that we were alive and all together.

Balser and I, of course, wanted to peep into the baskets, but a chorus of screams and protests checked our curiosity. The girls would not let us eat much breakfast, saying that we must save ourselves for dinner. We tried to convince them that we didn't have to save ourselves, — that we had enough hunger for both breakfast and dinner; but those tyrannical girls served us only a small ration and said we would have to be satisfied. After breakfast they drove us out of the house and kept us waiting in the cold until Mab came to the door and said, " Now you may come in."

On the table were presents that had been sent up to us by our folks. Among my presents, I well remember, was a great woollen neck comforter, long enough to wind about my throat a dozen times. The colors were patriotic — red, white, and blue — and I thought and still think it the most beautiful comforter in the world, for Mab had knitted it. She threw it about my neck and pulled both ends to choke me. Of course, that seemed very funny to everybody, and we all laughed till the tears came to our eyes. Mitts, and socks, and ear-warmers, and comforters, and chest protectors — all the work of loving hands — covered the table, and — and — bless my life! it almost makes me cry to remember how happy we were. It's too bad that there's always a tinge of sadness in the memory of great joy.

The girls went with us that morning to visit the traps. I wore my great comforter and almost smothered because it was so warm. I would have worn it even had I known that it would kill me. I walked with Mab, and, I tell you, I was happy. I hoped we would find no game in the traps, for I could not bear to think of causing suffering even to

a wolf at that time. Mab, too, was happy; and when we found a fox in a trap, we would have liberated it had it not fought so viciously when we tried to unspring the trap that we had to kill it. We freed a score of coons and muskrats, giving them their lives as a Christmas present from the girls.

When we had visited the traps, we went back to the cabin, and Balser climbed the tree on which our wild turkey was hanging and brought down the bird. We dipped the turkey in a great kettle of hot water to loosen the feathers, and soon it was bare. When the turkey was ready for the fire, we improvised a spit, using a steel ramrod for the purpose, and hung it over a great bed of hickory coals to roast. If you have never tasted a turkey roasted over the coals on a spit, you don't know how agreeable that noble bird can make itself to a man's palate.

We had only two chairs and two boxes, so, when dinner was served, the girls sat on the chairs and boxes, and Balser and I knelt at the table. I was so hungry I didn't know where to begin. The mince pie looked so good I wanted to start on that, but sister Nan said I didn't know how to eat.

"You just give me a piece of that pie, and I'll show you if I don't know how to eat," said I. "Eat? I could give a yearling shoat odds and make him blush for his appetite."

The remark was not very funny, but every one thought it was, and the matter of eating, urgent as it was, had to be postponed until we were through laughing. My joke went so well that I tried to think of another, but failed. Balser said something about his knees hurting the floor, and again the attack on the dinner was postponed. After we had laughed at Balser's joke, I said:—

"Now, every one keep still. I want to eat. I've laughed till I'm sore all over;" but Mab only laughed the more and said:—

"What's the use of eating so long as you can laugh?" so off we went again, and I thought we would never stop.

I again insisted that I wanted a piece of pie first.

My sisters all protested, but while Nan, the eldest, was carving the turkey, Mab, who sat next to where I was kneeling, cut the mince pie, and handed a piece to me under the table. When the others saw me eating

the pie, there was a great storm of protests, and everybody had to laugh again.

"Now, Mr. Shoat," said Nan, "pie is always eaten last, and as you are eating your pie, of course you have finished your dinner, and you don't get another mouthful."

But Mab said: "Don't cry, Tom Andy Bill. You shall have half of my dinner. I'll take enough for both."

In all the world there was not a gentler, tenderer heart than Mab's, and Tom Andy Bill was always first in it.

We were slow getting started because we were laughing and talking so much; but once we got under way, you should have seen that dinner disappear.

Turkey and "stuffing," mashed potatoes, delicious fresh bread, yellow butter, milk that was nearly all cream, jelly, a half-dozen kinds of preserved fruits, as many kinds of cake, mince pies, apple pies, sugar pies — all fell before our wrath, and soon I was so full that I thought one more mouthful would surely make me helpless. I would gladly give all I possess to eat just one more dinner like that before I die, but if I were worth millions I couldn't buy it.

After dinner we swept the snow from a long, narrow stretch of ice on the river and "skeeted." We had no skates; we simply ran and slid on the ice. Some one suggested that we slide for a prize, and the person making the longest "skeet" should win the trophy. There was one difficulty in the way of carrying out this plan. We had no prize.

I suggested, "Let's take a lock of Mab's hair for a prize."

Every one but Mab eagerly assented. She put her hands to her hair protectingly, and said, "No, *sir!*" But when we all insisted, she gave in, and I cut a lock of black, silky hair from her head with my penknife. I made up my mind to win that prize or die in the attempt.

When the ice path was cleared, we started in on our contest. The girls went first, then Balser "skeeted," and then I came to the scratch. I looked under my hand down the ice path, as if I were trying to see something very far off, and said: —

"The river isn't long enough for me. I'm afraid if I start too hard, I'll slide out through the mouth and land in the Ohio."

Every one laughed as usual, and I thought

I was a great wag. We were each to have ten trials, and the afternoon was pretty well advanced before we had finished the contest. I got the prize, and I got a smile along with it when Mab made the award that I valued even more highly than the trophy itself.

After "skeeting," we all flocked to the stable to milk and feed the cow, and to give Solomon his corn and hay. Everybody helped at the chores, and of course everybody laughed all the time. Solomon said very plainly that it had never before been his misfortune to meet such a lot of laughing fools; but though Solomon was wise, he didn't know everything. You see, he didn't understand our sort of wisdom. There's more wisdom in a laugh, Solomon, than is dreamt of in your philosophy.

The remains of dinner served us for supper, and after we had finished we moved the table back in the room. Nan brought out a great jug of hard cider,— *hard*, mind you,— and we all sat down on the floor in a half moon before the roaring fire, where we ate nuts, drank cider, popped corn, told stories, asked riddles, and played childish games till bedtime. Sister Nan allowed us just enough

to drink and no more, for hard cider will make you drunk if you take too much.

"Nan keeps the cider jug beside her," said Balser, playing on the word; and I went him one better and said:—

"I'm afraid she'll soon have it all inside her if we don't assert our rights."

We had laughed so much all day that we could not laugh any more, and our awful puns fell flat, as was perfectly right and just.

The girls remained all night and slept in our bed. Fortunately it was very broad, and fortunately, too, they could have slept anywhere. Balser and I took our bearskin sleeping-bags and went to the stable loft, where we were snug and warm in the hay. Grumbling Solomon tried to explain to us next morning that we had kept him awake, snoring; but we wouldn't understand his bad English, and, in fact, we didn't believe him anyway.

The day after Christmas the girls left us, and our cabin seemed to me like an Eveless Eden, a deserted, lonely Paradise.

Half an hour after my sisters and Mab had left the cabin, while Balser and I were sit-

ting before the fire, feeling very lonesome, and trying to make up our minds to visit the traps, we heard a great screaming outside, and we knew that the girls had come back to us in trouble. We hurried out to learn the cause of the screaming, and met the four girls a short distance below Solomon's barn, running for the cabin as fast as they could run, and screaming at the top of their voices.

"What on earth is the trouble now?" I asked.

Sister Nan gasped out the word "Bear!"

"Where are the horses?" I asked.

"They got frightened at the bear and reared up, and we slid off behind," said Nan.

"And then we were at the mercy of the bear," interrupted sister Betty.

"It seems to have been a merciful bear," I suggested. "You are all here, alive and whole of skin."

"Don't joke about it, Tom Andy Bill," said Mab, who was almost out of breath. "Our skins may be whole, but, I tell you, we are almost frightened out of them. Oh, it was awful! We came upon the bear right in front of us as we turned a bend in the path. The horses reared up, and of course we slid

off. Then the horses ran, and that awful bear arose on its hind feet, opened its frightful red mouth, and came right toward us with the most horrid growls you ever heard."

"What did *you* do?" I asked.

"Why, we screamed, of course, and ran, and kept on running and screaming till we got here."

"Where did you see the bear?" asked Balser.

"Just beyond the big hollow sycamore," answered my youngest sister.

The hollow sycamore stood by the side of the horse path, half a mile down-stream.

While we were talking, Balser ran to the house, and within two minutes he returned, bringing with him the dogs, guns, and ammunition. I took my gun, powder-horn, and bullets from him, and said: —

"Now, come with us, girls. Show us the bear, and we will avenge your wrong."

The girls very willingly went with us, feeling brave under the protection of two such mighty bear hunters, and before we had taken twenty steps on the war-path, they were laughing and talking as merrily as if nothing had happened to ruffle them.

I quieted them, saying: "If you want to catch the bear, you must keep still. The clatter you girls are making would frighten off a troupe of deaf and dumb lions."

Quiet reigned for a moment, but those girls were so happy they could no more keep from laughing than a mountain brook in springtime can keep from babbling.

When we approached the spot where the bear had been seen, the girls confined themselves to whispers, and, as father would have said, "giggling." They might as well have shouted. Balser and I, of course, were marching in the van of the laughing army, and the girls were following close at our heels. The first shot would certainly frighten them out of their wits and send them flying on the backward path. In fact, I had no hope at all of finding the bear. One might as well go to sea in a lead ship as hunt bears with a covey of girls. Balser, too, felt that our search was in vain. In truth, our real purpose in going with the girls was more to allay their fears and to find the horses than to kill a bear. We had no hope of the latter. We knew the bear would take itself off to safety when it heard us approaching, and I knew

that our only chance of killing "His Bearship" was to take up its spoor and follow it. That probably would mean an all day's journey, and we, of course, had no idea of taking the girls on such a tramp.

Balser and I had suggested to the girls the possibility that they might be frightened when the fight took place, but they, with more noise than sincerity, spurned the thought. "No, indeed, they would not be frightened! Just wait and see!"

When we were passing the hollow sycamore, I turned toward the girls and whispered: —

"I think the bear is right ahead of us." Of course, it was said to frighten them. I did not see Mab with the girls, so I asked, "Where's Mab?"

"She dropped her muff and has gone back to find it," answered Betty.

Balser and I were perhaps ten yards ahead of the girls, when he called back in a hoarse whisper: —

"Here's the bear! Here's the bear!" Then he whispered to me: "Let's fire and scare them. There's no bear within a mile of us, and we'll not see one."

Wanting to show off, he fired his gun, and I, too, blazed away at nothing. The result was most satisfactory, for the girls ran back on the path screaming like mad. *They* were not going to be frightened, no, not *they!* Balser and I stood laughing, but soon our tune changed, for in less than a minute the girls, that is, three of them, came running back to us, screaming and frightened in real earnest.

"There's another bear right back of us," cried Betty. Balser and I again laughed, but we were soon convinced that they had really seen a bear.

"Where was it?" I asked anxiously.

"It came out of the hollow sycamore just as we got there," answered Nan.

"Where is Mab? Where is Mab?" I asked. At last I was aroused.

"She is down the path, hunting her muff," answered Nan; "and the bear started right down in her direction."

So did I start in her direction as fast as I could run, and Balser after me.

"Load your gun!" I cried, "and come on quick."

I tried to load my gun as I ran, but I

spilled the powder and could not get a bullet in the muzzle. Balser stopped to load his gun, and soon overtook me. Then I stopped, and never in all my life did I load a gun so quickly.

I threw my coat to the ground and started after Balser. After I had passed him, I heard a piercing scream just ahead of me. I knew the scream was from Mab, though I could not see her, for the path made a sharp turn at that point, and the underbrush, though leafless, was so thick that I could not see through it.

When I rounded the bend in the path, my blood almost froze. One hundred yards ahead of me was the bear, and a few short yards ahead of it was Mab, running and screaming for dear life. The race between Mab and the bear would not last long. The girl, though braver than I when facing death at the hands of The Wolves, would soon fall from exhaustion and fright, and the infuriated bear would tear her to pieces.

There were two reasons why I dared not shoot. First, Mab was in line with the bear and me, and if my bullet should miss the black brute, it would surely find her. Sec-

ond, the bear's tail was toward me. I could get neither a broadside nor a head shot, and if I should hit the bear, my bullet would wound but would not kill, and a wounded bear is the incarnation of fury.

While these thoughts were flashing through my mind, the bear overtook Mab. I saw it stop and rise to its feet to strike the girl with its fearful paws. One blow would have killed her, for the bear was a monster.

The brute's momentary pause allowed Mab to gain a few feet in the race, and while the bear was upright, Balser fired, and I heard the bullet strike. Instantly Mab fell to the ground. I shouted, and the bear turned toward me. I hoped I had drawn the attack upon myself, and had my gun almost to my shoulder to fire at the bear's head, when it turned quickly and again presented its rump for my aim. By this time I had reduced the distance between the bear and me to twenty yards, and Mab was lying in the path a few yards ahead of the bear.

Of course, all that I am telling you occurred very rapidly — within a few seconds. In less than one second, it seemed to me, after the bear turned, it was standing over

Mab, who was lying on the ground. I saw its teeth glisten as it opened its great red mouth just over her white throat, and I thought that Mab had not another moment to live. If she were not already dead from Balser's bullet, the bear would soon kill her.

A thousand thoughts flashed through my mind in the hundredth part of a second, as a man may dream of the events of a lifetime during one beat of his pulse. I thought of my first meeting with Mab, of the swamp, of her flight, of her bravery, her beauty, her tenderness, and though I was but a boy of seventeen and she a girl of fifteen, I then knew that in all my life I should never find another girl to take her place in my heart; and — and I never have found one.

Well, as I have said, all these things flashed through my mind while the bear's terrible jaws were about to clutch Mab's throat. I acted entirely without thought and upon impulse. I was not conscious of lifting my gun to my shoulder. I do not remember firing, but I *did* fire, and I *do* remember seeing the bear spring into the air and fall back on Mab. My bullet had penetrated its brain. I also remember tossing the great

five-hundred-pound brute to one side as it it had been a fox, and I remember snatching Mab from the ground and running back down the path with my unconscious burden in my arms to where the girls were standing. I was as strong as an ox.

"See if she lives," I cried, laying Mab gently on the ground.

Nan felt her hands and said: "I don't know. I can't tell."

Then I fell on my knees and placed my ear over her heart. I distinctly heard its beating, and I sprang to my feet, crying excitedly:—

"She lives! She lives! See if she is shot, Nan!"

"Shot?" asked Nan in surprise.

"Yes," I answered. "Shot! Shot! Don't you understand? Remove her clothing and see if she is shot!"

I walked away and met Balser coming down the path. I stopped him and said:—

"Nan is trying to see if she is shot."

"Shot?" asked Balser. "Who shot her?"

"You, if any one," I answered. "She fell when you fired."

"Merciful God!" cried Balser, "did I

miss the bear and hit her? Let us examine the bear."

We ran to the dead bear and began a hurried examination. I found the wound of Balser's bullet in its neck, and I soon discovered my shot in its head. I then hastened back to the girls, shouting: —

"She is not shot! She is not shot! We've found both bullets in the bear."

"No, she is not shot," answered Nan, calmly, "but I fear she is dying."

Without another word, I took Mab in my arms and started home, wild with grief and strong with despair. Balser went back to fetch Solomon and the sleigh, but I went on toward home, carrying Mab in my arms. I had been walking perhaps ten minutes when a sigh came from her lips. She lifted her arm, twined it about my neck, and whispered my name, "Tom Andy Bill." I was wild with joy, but I did not speak. In a moment she said: —

"You saved my life. I saw you lift your gun; then I heard the bullet strike the bear's head within six inches of my face, and I knew your aim had been true."

She said she was not hurt, and she wanted

me to put her down; but I begged her to remain where she was, and she whispered: —

"We'll let the others think I haven't waked up yet."

Then she closed her eyes again, and I marched proudly through the snow, as strong as Samson, the happiest boy in all the world.

The road over which the sled could be drawn made a circuit east of the river, while the horse path over which we were travelling hugged the banks for quite a distance downstream and joined the wagon road four miles above father's house. When we reached the wagon road we halted to wait for Balser, and soon we saw Solomon's ears coming majestically down the track, as one sees first the topmasts of an approaching ship at sea. Presently Solomon greeted us with a song of welcome, and when he came up to us, he was puffing and blowing like a racehorse just off the course.

"I came just as quickly as I could, and I do believe I made a mile a minute," said the wise one. At least, that is what Mab said he said, but Balser said that the donkey travelled so slowly that part of the time it

seemed as if they were going backward. We didn't know which to believe.

We put Mab in the sleigh, much against her will, and I insulted Solomon so grievously by attempting to lead him by the bridle that he would not budge. When I left his head, he stepped forward with ears apeak, proud as any peacock. Mab laughed, and when no one would get into the sleigh to ride with her, she said she wouldn't ride alone, so she jumped out. Despite the girls' entreaties and my commands, she walked home with us and was none the worse for her terrible adventure.

The two horses had run home after dumping the girls in the snow, and our folks were greatly alarmed.

We found awaiting us, besides father and mother, two strange gentlemen and a lady. They were elegantly dressed city folks, and when we entered the room where they were sitting, the lady ran at once to Mab, saying: "It is she! It is she! She is the very image of my sister!"

Mab stepped back from the lady in surprise and asked:—

"What is the matter? What do you want?"

I knew instinctively that they wanted Mab, and I was not surprised when the lady said: —

"We want you, my dear. We want to take you with us. I am your mother's sister; this gentleman is your uncle, and the other gentleman is my husband. We learned from an old woman named Polly Wolf, who died in the Cincinnati jail, that you had been stolen by a band of robbers who plundered a stage-coach a few years ago, and killed your father and mother. The old woman said you had run away from her house with two boys who lived farther west near the Michigan Road. We commenced our search for you at once, and at last have found you. We will give you a home and will care for you as if you were our daughter."

"But I have a good home," said Mab.

"Yes, yes, we know," interrupted one of the gentlemen. Turning to the lady, he said, "Sit down, Eliza, and let me question the girl."

The lady sat down, and the gentleman asked: —

"Your name is Mab, is it not?"

Mab answered, "It is."

"Do you know your father's name?" asked the gentleman.

"No," responded Mab. "At Polly's I went by the name of Mab Wolf. But I knew that Granny and Grandpap Wolf were no kin to me."

"It is as I expected," said the gentleman. "Do you remember when you first came to Granny Wolf's?" he asked.

"Yes. I was taken from a stage-coach. I was perhaps five years old."

"There is no further doubt," said the gentleman, turning to my father. "We thank you for your kindness to the girl. We will pay you for your trouble and will relieve you of her care."

"You owe me nothing," said father. "Mab has been no trouble to us. She has been a delight and a comfort; hasn't she, wife?"

"Indeed she has," answered mother.

"We can at least give you our gratitude," said the gentleman, "and I am sure you will be glad that the girl has found her people, and that they have found her."

"I'm not so sure that I am glad," answered father. "Do you want to leave us, Mab?"

"No, no, daddy," cried Mab, running to

father's side and grasping his arm. "I don't want to go; I want to stay with you."

"But this is not your home," interrupted the gentleman. "Your aunt and I are your natural guardians, and our home is the proper place for you."

"What you say may all be true," said father, "but how am I to know it?"

"Haven't I just told you all the circumstances of the case?" answered the gentleman. "The girl is the image of her mother. Any one who knew my sister would know that this girl is her child."

"Yes, but you see I didn't know your sister," answered father.

Then the gentleman grew angry and said, "My good man, your intentions are all right, but you are much too officious in this matter, and we shall have to insist upon the girl coming with us at once."

"Again I ask you, do you want to go with these folks, Mab?" asked father.

"No, no! A thousand times no!" cried the girl, clinging to father and beginning to weep.

"Then," said father, addressing the gentlemen and the lady, "I shall have to ask you

to go outside the house and do your insisting, for the girl shall not go with you against her will."

"I'll bring the sheriff and take her," answered the gentleman, angrily; "I won't be bullied by an old fool like you."

"Go and get the sheriff if you wish," said father, "but go quickly, or I'll start you on your way with my boot. I reckon you'll have to get a writ from the court—a writ of habeas corpus—before the sheriff will interfere. The sheriff happens to be my brother. I would like to call your attention to the door. You can get out one at a time, I reckon, and that'll be fast enough for me, if you hurry."

The strangers left the house, declaring that they would soon return, armed by the law, and would "show us."

What they intended to show us, we did not know, but in a general way we supposed that they meant they would take Mab away from us.

That was a sad day at our house. Mab wept nearly all afternoon, and clung to mother and father, and to my sisters, with a piteous appeal for protection.

Balser went home for the night; and next

day we went back to the cabin, loaded our furs on the sleigh, and abandoned our quarters for the winter. If the strangers came again to take Mab away, I wanted to be at home when they arrived.

We lived that winter in constant dread of losing Mab, but when winter turned to spring, and spring to summer, we began to forget our fear; and by fall we had settled down to the glad belief that she would not be taken from us.

"Did you go back to get the bear?" asked a small boy.

"Indeed we did," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "It weighed nearly five hundred pounds and was as fat as butter."

"Did you get his hide?" asked the same boy.

"Yes," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill, "and we gave it to Mab."

All the older members of Tom Andy Bill's audience knew that Mab had been his one and only sweetheart; and there was not one among us whose heart did not beat in sorrow and throb with love for grand old Tom Andy Bill, who had lived his long life true to his

one love, and would die with her image and hers alone nestling in his heart of hearts.

Amidst the pictures of bears, robbers, swamps, and caves that he had drawn for our entertainment, I could see, towering above all, the tall, strong figure, the black, waving hair, the dark, grave eyes, glowing with the light of a great soul, of our friend and protector, Tom Andy Bill. He had missed the best thing in life, — the love of the woman he loved, — but he had known plentifully the next best thing the world has to offer; that is, the happiness one gives to others.

"Wasn't it funny, Uncle Tom Andy Bill," said Mab, "that her name was the same as mine?"

"No, it wasn't funny, sweetheart. It was just sad." Tears sprang to the old man's eyes, and they came to other eyes, too, as he walked off to bed with Baby Mab clinging to his finger.

CHAPTER XI

WYANDOTTE ONCE MORE

Balser and I spent the following winter also in our cabin, and we had another fine lot of furs, which we took to Cincinnati just as soon as the road was good. We received only one hundred and twenty dollars for them, but that was a great sum in those days. It looked small to us, however, because we had always in mind the dream of Wyandotte's treasure. We had settled on one fact. The five chests could not possibly contain less than five thousand dollars, and that sum would make us rich.

We had discussed the treasure so often, and had talked about it so much between ourselves, that we felt as if it were already ours, and that, with a little patience, we would possess it. We had never mentioned the treasure even to the folks at home. I confess that I *did* tell Mab about it; but the secret was as safe with her as it was with me, and she was

very proud to feel that she was the only one besides Balser and me who knew about it. Of course, Balser didn't know that I had told Mab.

I can't explain why we felt so sure of getting the treasure, but this I know, that we never doubted, even for one moment, that the gold would one day be ours.

On the road to Cincinnati we were received as heroes at the inns and taverns, and were pointed out to strangers as the boys who had broken up the Wolf gang two years before. We could have stopped at any tavern along the road without paying a cent for our meals and lodging, but we loved to camp out. We took our time going and returning, and slept under the wagon every pleasant night.

The first evening out of Cincinnati, on our way home, we camped on the banks of a small river — I think it was Whitewater. Camping near us was an old man with a six-ox team and an enormous schooner wagon. A schooner wagon-bed was built high at each end like the old-fashioned ships in which Columbus crossed the sea, and would hold nearly as much as one could store in a small ship.

When we reached Whitewater, we found the old man trying to corral his oxen. An ox is a very stupid brute, but when a fact once penetrates his brain, it takes complete possession of him. If he realizes that his master has lost control of him, he is the most stubborn, aggravating four-footed creature that breathes. The old man's oxen had broken loose, and he was in trouble. After we had unhitched and fed our horses, we hastened to our neighbor's assistance and soon every ox was knee-haltered and reduced to submission.

"Much obleeged," said the old man. "My Indian ran away this noon, and I'm lame, as you see. These fool oxen seem to know that I can't manage them alone. I'd 'a' had a powerful hard time if you boys hadn't come to my help. Thank ye a heap. Like as not ye'll be here in the morning, and mebbe I kin git ye to help me yoke up. The oxen are powerful fine critters, but they haven't been worked for two months, and they're feelin' their oats. Besides, as I said, they know I'm alone. Reckon they won't be so frisky by the time they git to Fort Chicago."

"Where is Fort Chicago?" asked Balser.

"It's 'way up on the lakes," answered the old man. "I can't tell ye where it is 'zactly, except that it's in Illinois and on the lake. I 'low it'll take me two months to git thar with this load even if the roads keep good. If the roads git bad, Lord only knows when I'll git thar. I'm haulin' this load o' goods fer the Astor Fur Company, so it's all right if I git thar by winter, to have the goods thar in time fer the trappers."

We invited the old man to eat supper with us, and he was delighted with our fare. He had nothing to eat but boiled beans and salt pork, and he said he was so tired of it that he dreaded the approach of meal-time. His appetite was nothing like mine, or he would have welcomed meal-time though he had nothing but beans.

Next morning we helped our neighbor to yoke up, and when we were about to leave him, he said: —

"I thank ye, boys, fer helpin' me. I hain't got a piece o' money to my name or I'd pay ye."

"We wouldn't think of taking a cent," said Balser; "but if you have no money, how will you manage to travel so far?"

"I carry my grub in the wagon," said he, "and camp out, rain er shine. If I have to buy anything, I trade goods fer it if I kin. If I can't trade, I go without. If there's anything I've got in the wagon that ye want, I'll give it to ye, and welcome. Like as not, now, ye'd like to have a little powder?"

"We want nothing," I answered.

"How are you going to get along by yourself with the oxen?" asked Balser.

"Lord only knows. I don't," the old man replied. "Mebbe I'll be able to find a man along the road to go with me in place of the one that run away, but it ain't likely. Fort Chicago is so far, and men don't know nothin' 'bout the Fur Company, so they don't want to risk workin' fer nothin', and findin' themselves broke so far away from home at the end o' their job."

Balser and I loved the gypsy life along the road, and after consulting together, we agreed to offer the old fellow our help. Balser told me to speak to him, so before we started, I said:—

"We'll stay with you till you reach Blue River, and maybe you can find a man there that will go the rest of the way."

"I can't pay ye, boys, 'cept in goods," said the old man, "and it would be mighty poor pay, for the company only 'lows three bits a day fer help fer this wagon, and that'll be mighty little fer sech fine boys as ye be."

"I tell you, we don't want pay," said I.

"Well, then, I'll thank ye a heap more than three bits a day," said our new friend.

We undertook a bigger job than we had counted on, for the oxen moved like snails compared with our horses, and we frequently had to wait half a day for the old man to overtake us; but we were in no hurry and enjoyed loitering along the road, talking about the treasure and camping out. The weather was beautiful and the road was fine, but it took us nearly a week to get to Blue River.

Before we reached home we had learned to like the old man, and when one evening he unyoked on the banks of Blue, we were sorry to part from him.

We came down from home early next morning and tried to find a man to go with him, but after asking every idle fellow in the village of Blue River, we returned to our friend and told him that we had failed.

"I didn't 'low ye could find one," said

the old man. "It's hard to git any one to work fer the Fur Company 'cept Indians and half breeds. The fellow that run away from me was a half breed. His father was a Frenchman and his mother was a Wyandotte."

Balser and I sprang to our feet at the word "Wyandotte" and asked in chorus: —

"Where did you find him?"

"I think he come from a tribe of Indians that spent the winter out west o' Fort Chicago somewhere. They say there's a bunch o' Wyandottes among them — the last o' the tribe — and I'm told that the old Wyandotte chief is their chief."

Perhaps you think that Balser and I were not excited.

"Tom Andy Bill, I want to speak to you!" Balser said. We went off to a little distance, and he continued: "Here's our chance. Let's go with the old man."

"Don't say a word," said I, which meant, "I'm with you."

Then we went back to the old man, and I acted as spokesman: —

"You stay here till to-morrow and maybe we'll go with you!"

"If ye will, I'll try to get the company to double the wages," he answered, "and they will pay you in cash when you git to Fort Chicago."

Balser and I hurried home and told our folks that we had an opportunity to go to Fort Chicago with the old man at good wages, and after considerable discussion during the evening, they partially consented, though our mothers did so very reluctantly.

Next morning Balser came down, and while we were talking over the proposition with father and mother, Mab didn't once take her eyes off me. When it was settled that we were to go, she left the room and went out to the back porch. In a moment or two I followed, and found her crying.

"Are you crying, Mab?" I asked.

"No-o-o," she answered, turning her face from me.

"I'll not go if you want me to stay," I said, hoping in my heart she would ask me not to go.

"No, no, Tom Andy Bill," she replied, turning toward me, careless of her tears. "You must go. You must not think of me. I would not stand in your way for a

moment, and I know I am very foolish to cry. But Nan and Betty and Sue are crying, and I don't see why I, too, can't cry."

"There is this difference, Mab," I answered. "Your tears hurt me, burn me, and I would not cause you one moment's grief for anything in the world."

"Yes, I know, Tom Andy Bill. You are always thinking of my happiness, and I'll not cry any more. I'll — I'll — I'll be glad that so good a chance has come to you. I'm not crying now." But she was crying, though she tried to laugh.

Soon my sisters came out to the porch, and — and — well, the widespread misery I was creating might have been considered a luxury by some boys, for all my sisters were sweet, beautiful girls, and Mab was without a peer; but their tears made me suffer.

"It's all off, girls, it's all off. I'll not go a step!" said I, tossing my hands in the air. But then came a chorus of protests and tears and a shower of kisses, — kisses from all save Mab, — and I said I would go if they insisted upon it. My sisters soon stopped crying, but Mab could not stop, and Nan, good, tender, motherly Nan, put her arm about her and

told her not to cry, — that Tom Andy Bill would be home again before long.

Mab answered between her sobs: "Yes, I know he'll be back. I'm foolish, but — I feel — something tells me — that I'll never see him again, and — and — oh, I'm so ashamed of myself, but I can't help it, Nan, I can't help it."

Balser was waiting for me at the gate, so my sisters kissed me again, and I saw Nan motion to Betty and Sue to leave. When they had gone into the house, Nan kissed me and took Mab by the hand, saying, "Tom Andy Bill is your brother, too, Mab." Then she led her to me and hurried into the house, and — and — well, I — I — can't tell you about that ——

Balser and I found the old man waiting for us, and he was overjoyed when we said we would go with him.

At Cincinnati we had purchased two fine saddles with enormous saddle-bags. We had also bought two beautiful short-barrel, smooth-bore guns, in which we could use either a large bullet or bird shot. We each took a vast store of ammunition, a fine woollen blanket, a new buckskin suit, and an extra

pair of boots. We rode a pair of fine horses, and in fact we had an outfit good enough for any dandy traveller.

It was the first week in May when we started. We did not reach Fort Chicago till the last week in June, and that was considered a record-breaking trip. Chicago, at that time, consisted of a few houses built in the midst of the muddiest mud I ever saw. Soon after we reached there, Balser and I began making cautious inquiries about Indians.

Every day brought numbers of the redskins to the Fur Company's quarters, and we contrived to question most of them about the Wyandottes. We were always on our guard when asking questions concerning the remnant of the tribe, for our secret was so precious we feared it would leak out with every word we spoke. There was, of course, little danger of our betraying our thoughts; but if you will let five thousand dollars rest on your mind for two or three years, to the exclusion of everything else, you'll learn what a burden gold really may be.

Balser and I had grown to be monomaniacs on the subject of the treasure, but Balser's affliction was more serious than mine.

He lived and breathed treasure, and dreamed of it open-eyed and asleep.

The Fur Company paid us double wages, as our old friend had promised, and we were eager to get away and to learn the whereabouts of the lost tribe of Wyandottes.

We had been waiting nearly a week at Fort Chicago when, by the merest accident, Balser stumbled upon an Indian who was just leaving the fort. Balser addressed him by the salutation we had learned from Wyandotte, and the Indian, who was surprised and seemed pleased, responded in the same tongue.

"Do you speak English?" asked Balser.

"Leetle spik him," replied the Indian.

"Are you a Wyandottte?" asked Balser.

"Yes, Wyandotte," he answered.

"I love Wyandotte," said Balser. "My friend loves Wyandotte. We cry because the Wyandottes were treated so cruelly by the bad whites."

The Indian began to talk rapidly for an Indian, and Balser invited him to the cabin we were occupying on the skirts of the fort. There we gave the Indian a few presents and asked him where his tribe was. He told us that the few remaining Wyandotte

Indians had joined with a band of Winnebagoes that had come down from the north, and that they were all living now in the prairies west of Chicago, toward the great Father of Waters, the Mississippi.

Balser and I were overjoyed at the news, and told him we were going in that direction. We said he might travel with us if he wished, and that we meant to stop with his tribe for a while and would give them presents.

We hastily saddled our horses, packed our saddle-bags, and off we went with the Indian, whose name was Broken Toe.

That night we camped in the prairie, feasting on prairie hens. The next night we also camped in the prairie, and Broken Toe told us we should reach the Indian village next day at "half sun," that is, noon. We knee-haltered our horses, placed our saddle-bags, guns, etc., under a waterproof canvas, rolled ourselves in our blankets, and went to sleep.

When we awoke in the morning, Broken Toe was missing. So were our horses, saddles, saddle-bags, and guns. We were left with nothing but our blankets and the clothing we wore. The sky was overclouded,

and we could not see the sun. We could not tell east from west, nor north from south. On every hand the flat, grass-covered prairie was bounded only by the horizon. No object of any sort broke the dead level as far as our eyes could reach. We had not a mouthful to eat, nor any means of procuring food. When we awakened we were very hungry, but the realization of our desperate condition drove all thoughts of breakfast from our minds.

After gazing about us helplessly for a few moments, Balser said: —

"Now, what do you think of this?"

"Don't say a word," I answered. "Let us start in some direction, and we'll soon raise something above the horizon."

We folded our blankets, threw them over our shoulders, and prepared to march.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Balser.

"I don't care, so that we get to moving in some direction," I answered. "If we could only see the sun for a moment, it would at least be some satisfaction to know the points of the compass. We are as badly lost here in daylight as we were in the darkness of the cave, but we have this advantage; we

can keep on going. Which way shall we go?"

"We'll go with the wind," suggested Balser.

"That's the word," said I.

Balser tossed a handful of dry grass into the air, and we started off with the wind. Soon after we had started rain began to fall. The rain made us very uncomfortable, and we grumbled because our blankets and clothing were wet, but a man often finds fault with the very thing he needs.

Before the rain we had been walking along aimlessly; there was nothing to guide us. But within an hour after the rain began, the ground became soft, and soon we noticed the tracks of two horses. Had the rain not softened the soil, we could not have seen the tracks, and we might have been wandering over the boundless prairie yet. We knew that the tracks we saw had been left by our horses, for ours were shod, while the Indian's horse never knows the luxury of a shoe.

The horse tracks gave us new life, and we followed up the trail at a rapid walk. We were growing very tired, when, toward evening, I noticed on the horizon, almost in front of us, a blue spiral of smoke. As the day

was misty and the atmosphere thick, I knew the smoke could not be seen at a great distance; therefore I felt sure that within an hour we should at least find fire, and where fire is, man is not far distant. The smoke rose higher and higher as we drew near it, and before long we easily distinguished the skin-covered tents or tepees of an Indian village.

We had little fear of the Indians except for the fact that they had stolen our horses and might want to kill us to hide their theft. We were soaked to the skin, almost starved, and without means of getting food. We were nearly exhausted, and had no choice but to appeal to the Indians for help. We therefore marched as boldly as possible right into the village, though, to tell the truth, all the boldness was on the outside and there was a great deal of fear within. We both wished ourselves well at home and once more felt like cursing the Wyandotte treasure.

The first sight that greeted our eyes on entering the village was our horses. The second object we observed was a pack of hungry-looking, vicious dogs that charged down upon us with an evident eye to supper.

The barking of the dogs aroused the Indians, and we were soon surrounded by half a hundred men, women, and children, all talking, shouting, and howling at once. In their midst was Broken Toe, who seemed to be their leader. The Indian men immediately formed a ring about us, and began a most disconcerting war-dance with two badly frightened boys in the center. The war-dance now meant death to us later on.

"We're goners this time," said Balser.

"Don't say a word," said I.

The Indians kept up their absurd dancing and war-whoops, and soon their crazy antics became amusing to me. I laughed, and Balser said: —

"For the Lord's sake, Tom Andy Bill, don't laugh. Don't you know they're going to kill us? Do you see that red devil coming on the jump with his tomahawk?"

"Don't say a word," said I. "The Indians will think none the less of us for laughing at them. If a man laughs when he dies, he takes all the sting out of death."

"Good Lord, Tom Andy Bill, you freeze my blood," said Balser. "There comes another fiend with a knife as long as my arm."

The Indian with the long knife sprang howling into the circle, and made a thrust at me as if he intended to hide his knife-blade in my body. I didn't flinch. I laughed at him. Then a double-jointed giant sprang in front of Balser and raised his murderous-looking tomahawk above his head. I thought Balser's hour had come at last, but I said:

"Don't say a word. Laugh."

Balser didn't look as if he wanted to laugh, but he sent forth a peal that was a pretty good imitation of the real thing.

Indians don't laugh, therefore they don't fully understand the meaning of laughter. In a dim way they seem to comprehend that it means, "Do your worst; I don't care a straw!" and of all the sentiments a man can express, the Indian respects that most.

Presently another Indian sprang in front of me, and with a demoniac howl flourished his tomahawk above my head. I laughed at him and waved him off with a turn of my hand, as if to say, "Oh, stop your foolishness!" when he joined the howling jumping-jacks that surrounded us.

After the men had danced about us till they were tired, they gave way to the squaws, who

formed another circle. One old hag left the ring and spat upon me. I laughed and spat back at her, as if we were playing a game at a frolic.

The Indian's most expressive and useful word is a grunt, "*Ugh.*" It may mean anger, disgust, assent, refusal, and on rare occasions it is used to express the meagre sensation of amusement they sometimes feel. A strong emotion of joy, or a feeling of what we would call amusement, the Indian expresses, if at all, in howls, whoops, and shouts. While the old hag and I were playing our little game, I distinctly heard several Indian men give utterance to the grunt "Ugh."

I was more or less familiar with the various intonations of the sound and could imperfectly guess at their significance, as one may learn the different meanings of a dog's bark, so I gathered that our little game had, in a way, amused the bucks. After dancing about us for ten minutes, the squaws fell upon Balser and me and stripped us of most of our clothing. They took our blankets, hats, coats, and shoes, and left us only our trousers. Then they ran away, grunting and cackling.

After we had stood alone for the space of three or four minutes, I noticed a dozen warriors coming toward us, as if they were trying to steal upon their prey. Broken Toe was in the lead. I also noticed that two of the men carried in their hands, behind them, lariats or ropes of leather. At first, I thought they intended to hang us, but I soon called to mind the fact that Indians never inflict death by hanging. I also reflected that there was not a tree in sight, and I knew there was not enough timber within a radius of twenty miles to build a scaffold. I therefore concluded that the redskins were stealing upon us for the purpose of overpowering us by a sudden attack, and binding our hands and feet.

"Good-by, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser, dolefully; "they're going to hang us."

"Don't you believe it," I answered hurriedly; "I wasn't born to be hung. They mean to throw us to the ground and then bind us. Let's save them part of the trouble."

When the Indians approached, I walked toward them, holding my arms extended and my wrists together, ready to be bound. The Indians stopped, but I continued to go toward

them, holding out my wrists for the lariat. I stopped in front of one of the men with the ropes, and Balser stopped in front of the other. Our conduct inspired a series of grunts.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh," in all its inflections fell upon our ears. We could not interpret the grunts, but presently Broken Toe made a sign to the men with the lariats, and they proceeded to bind our wrists. When this pleasing job was finished, I stepped up to Broken Toe and spoke the one word "Friend"; but he grunted a contemptuous "Ugh," and touched his knife significantly.

I waited for thirty seconds, and then I said: "Hungry. Eat. Drink." Again a chorus of grunts greeted us, and all the Indians began to talk at once. We could not understand what they were saying, but it was evident they were arguing the question of our fate. Some of the Indians apparently wanted to befriend us; but Broken Toe, being the one who had stolen our horses, seemed to oppose all kindly intentions. After a great deal of grunting and talking, Broken Toe made an angry gesture, accompanied by some words of command. There-

upon two Indians took charge of Balser, and two grasped my arms. Broken Toe walked off toward the other end of the village, and we were forced to follow. We soon came to an open space surrounded by tepees, and there one of the Indians said in English, "Sit down."

We gladly obeyed, for we were very tired. The thongs of leather were removed from our wrists; our arms were bent behind us, and in that position we were tied. Then the Indians bound our ankles. The brutes drew the lariats so tight that I saw blood spurt from Balser's wrists, and felt blood trickling down my hands behind me.

"Curse the brutes," cried Balser. "I'll never again say a good word for an Indian. I'm almost dead now. If they are going to kill us, I wish they'd do it at once."

"Don't say a word," said I. "While there's life there's hope, and I'll bet you my half of Wyandotte's treasure that we'll get out of this all right. Brace up, old fellow, and laugh. Make the red devils think that the lariat tickles you!"

I began to whistle, though it was pretty hard work, and when the Indians turned to

look at me in wonder, I spoke to Balser, laughing as if it were all a huge joke. Balser, too, laughed, and I called to Broken Toe, saying: —

"I'm hungry, give me something to eat; and I'm thirsty, give me something to drink!"

But soon the Indians left us, and when they had gone, I thought I was going to collapse. As usual, I was brave when some one was looking on. I do believe I should have cried if Balser had crooked his finger at me, but he couldn't do it, being bound; so I soon began to whistle to keep my courage up. Balser began to groan, but I checked him, saying:

"Be game, Balser, be game! You've got to die sometime. If you die now, it will save you the trouble later on. Always finish a bad job as soon as possible."

"I don't mind for myself," he answered, almost ready for tears, "but I'm thinking of how poor mother will wait and grieve for me through all the years of her life. She will never know my fate; neither will your mother nor Mab ever know."

"Ah, Balser, please don't! don't! I had worked myself into fine shape, but the thought of Mab and my mother — oh! don't, don't!

You mustn't think of such things now. Drive such thoughts out of your mind, and we'll show these demons how to die. That's the one thing they know better how to do than we."

"But I don't want to know how," answered Balser.

"Well, you'll know before long, if I'm not mistaken, so laugh while you can, for the time will soon come when you'll laugh no more. I don't know how they're going to kill us, but it does look dark for us. However, I'll stick to my bet, and I'll wager my half of the treasure that we get out of the scrape yet. There's no use taking the darker view of it until there's no other view to take, and I'm sorry I said you would not have long to laugh. You have many a laugh ahead of you yet, Balser. Cheer up! Cheer up, and take my wager."

"Tom Andy Bill, I believe you're crazy," said Balser, "but if you are, I wish I could go crazy, too, or that these redskins would hurry up and finish us."

We were sitting on the ground, bound hand and foot, and of course could not rise.

Balser had hardly finished speaking when

two old squaws came toward us, one bearing a bucket of water and the other carrying a pan of cornmeal mush. They placed the bucket and the pan on the ground, and kneeling close beside us, teasingly offered first the water and then the mush; but our hands being bound, we could take neither. This evidently was great sport to the hags, for they grunted and cackled gleefully. They had no intention of giving us food, but evidently had been sent by Broken Toe to torment us.

In the pan of mush was a great wooden spoon. One of the squaws, dipping out a spoonful of mush, held it toward my mouth. I leaned forward to take the mush, but when my lips touched it, I found that it was scalding hot, and quickly drew away. This also seemed to amuse the hags; and to make the joke doubly funny, she thrust the hot mush in my face. The pain was excruciating, but I laughed. I had made up my mind that I would not give these red demons the satisfaction of knowing I could suffer pain.

Just as the old hag thrust the mush in my face, several men approached. The humorous squaw was kneeling near my feet and the pan of mush was just behind her. I con-

tinued to laugh, but I wanted to kill the old she-devil; so I lifted my feet, and as if I were carrying out the joke, kicked her in the face and she fell backward. My part of the jest proved better than I had hoped, for she quickly stretched out her hand to keep from falling backward, and put it in the hot mush. Then a howl went up that might have been heard all over the village. It was the sweetest note I ever heard come from an Indian's lips, and I laughed in real earnest. In a moment the squaw was upon me, belaboring my head with the wooden spoon; but one of the men whom I fancied had spoken in our behalf when we first entered the village came to my rescue, thrust her violently from me, gave her two or three kicks, and sent her about her business.

The Indian spoke to the other squaw, and she poured a little of the water into the mush to cool it. She then held the rim of the bucket to our lips, and we drank. I tell you, the delicious ecstasy one finds in a drink of water is well worth a day of thirst. After we had drunk our fill, the squaw fed us the mush and we felt much better. When we had eaten, we were left to ourselves.

Soon after the sun had gone down, we heard in another part of the village a faint, low chant rising and falling with the gusts of wind.

"That chant is our funeral song," said Balser.

I feared he was right, but I tried to think of something else, though with little success. Presently we saw the light of a fire a short distance off.

"There comes a man with an armful of wood," said Balser. "And there comes another! I do believe the red devils are going to burn us!"

"Don't say a word," said I, trying to whistle, but it did look very much as if he were right.

Within less than ten minutes after we saw the fire, the men came howling and bounding into the open space that surrounded Balser and me. The redskins were in full war paint and feathers. Some of them had their arms full of wood, which they threw down within ten yards of where Balser and I lay. Presently a buck ran back to the fire we had first seen, and soon returned, waving on high a burning brand. As he passed us, he thrust

it in Balser's face, and would have burned him had he not quickly fallen backward.

"Laugh," I whispered. Balser laughed, but I never want to hear another laugh like that.

Soon the redskins had a great fire blazing in front of us. When it was well under way, they formed a circle about us and began to whoop and howl and dance. The glow of the fire on the painted faces of the Indians made them look like demons, and the lights and shadows dancing about like infernal imps made the place look like a scene from the very depths of the inferno.

The men danced and howled for a long time, perhaps for half an hour, and judging from the preparations they were making with the fire, I felt sure they were getting ready to burn us, and would soon have us roasting on a bed of coals.

I said to Balser: "I withdraw that bet. It will soon be all over, old boy, but die like a man. Game is the word."

"Don't fear for me," he answered; "I am ready. The devils can't begin too soon."

Hardly had he spoken when four Indians rushed in upon us, lifted us rudely to our feet,

and began to drag us toward the great bed of coals. When we came within twenty feet of the fire, the Indians stopped. During the little space of time in which we were being dragged toward the fire, I happened to think of the name "Monyomo." When the men who had us in charge paused, the howling of the redskins ceased, and a brief silence ensued; then I lifted my face toward the sky and shouted the words: "Wyandotte Wyolyo!! Monyomo!!"

The result was magical, and I saw the Indians start and look toward me in surprise. I thought if a little was good, a great deal was better, so lifting my head and looking toward the sky, I again called out in long-drawn syllables:—

"Wy—an—dotte Wy—ol—yo!! Monyo-o-o-mo-o!!"

After a long pause I again made my incantation. When I ceased the men drew away from us to a short distance, speaking in hushed, awe-stricken voices the words "Wyandotte Wyolyo—Wyandotte Wyolyo." Broken Toe seemed to insist upon burning us, but others opposed him. After a long consultation, two of them ran toward a large

tepee standing perhaps a hundred yards distant from us. Soon they came running back and said something to the other Indians. Immediately the thongs were removed from our ankles, and one of the Indians said, "Come." He started toward the large tepee, and we gladly followed, with Broken Toe grumbling at our heels. When we reached the wigwam, Broken Toe and another Indian entered with us, and there, by the dim light of a small torch, we saw our old friend Wyandotte lying on a blanket.

"Tomandybilladdison?" asked Wyandotte, in a weak voice.

"Yes," I answered.

"Balserbrent?" the old Indian asked, and Balser said: —

"Yes."

Wyandotte lay still for a moment; then he said something in the Indian language, and Broken Toe held the torch, first to my face, then to Balser's. The old man rose to his elbow, waved his hand to Broken Toe, and said, "Ugh!"

My ears, sharpened by every instinct I possessed, caught the intonation of the word, and in some mysterious way I seemed to

know that our lives were saved if Wyandotte could save them.

"We're all right," I whispered aside to Balser, and turning to Wyandotte, I inquired: "Are you sick, Wyandotte?"

"Yes; to die," answered the old Indian, falling back upon his bed. He was almost exhausted by the effort he had made; but after he had regained a little strength, he spoke to the Indians, and the thongs were removed from our wrists. My hands were lifeless, and I feared that I should never again be able to use them. I could not have lifted a straw from the ground.

We waited anxiously for Wyandotte to speak; and by and by he said, pointing to Broken Toe, who was standing just inside the tepee door: —

"Broken Toe stole your horses?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Your guns?"

"Yes."

"Your saddles?"

"Yes."

"Going to kill ye, maybe?" asked the old Indian.

"Yes," I answered.

"That man?" he asked, pointing again to Broken Toe.

"Yes. He directed the preparations to burn us," I responded.

Wyandotte's eyes glistened, and after a great effort he rose again to a sitting posture in his bed, uttering the one word, "Gun."

Broken Toe handed the old man his gun and stepped back toward the door of the tepee with the look of a frightened wolf in his face. Wyandotte examined the gun for a moment, and deliberately lifted it to his shoulder. A flash and a report startled us, and Broken Toe lay dead at the feet of his chief.

Wyandotte put the gun beside him on the ground, lay down on his blanket, and said, speaking to me: —

"Go. Wyandotte see you to-morrow."

We stepped over the still quivering body of Broken Toe, and walked out of Wyandotte's tepee with a new lease of life.

Just outside the tepee we found a score of Indian men standing about in silence. They had discarded their war feathers, and looked like a pack of crestfallen, cowardly wolves. The fellow that had us in charge spoke a few words to the others, and conducted us to a

tepee near by. The inmates of the wigwam were turned out, and we were put in possession. Our clothing, blankets, saddles, saddlebags, guns, and ammunition were all brought into the tent, and within half an hour a young squaw brought us two broiled prairie hens, a pan of corn pone, and a bucket of water. These she placed before us and took her leave.

"The following morning we saw Wyandotte, but I'll tell you about that to-morrow evening," said Tom Andy Bill.

"Please tell us about it now, Uncle Tom," pleaded Mab.

"Bless your life, sweetheart," he answered, "you can hardly keep your eyes open now."

"Oh, yes, I can," answered Mab. "I'll not be able to close them this night for thinking of those awful Indians and the way they treated you." She nervously grasped the favorite finger, and continued: "Oh, but I am glad I have you! You shall never, never any more go where I can't see you. I'll stay awake all night, watching you through the door for fear something will get you. I know I can't sleep a wink."

"Yes, you will, honey," the old man answered, rising to his feet. "I'll kiss your eyelids and speak a charm — a sure charm — that I know, and you can't help going to sleep." Then the two children, — one a child in years, the other a child in heart, — hand in hand, went off to bed.

I remained before the fire long after the rest of the audience had departed, and presently there came to me over the bedroom transom, the deep, clear voice of Tom Andy Bill, speaking the charm as softly as a mother coos to her babe: —

> "Sandman, banish tears and sighs,
> Sandman — Sandman, close Mab's eyes."

I sat musing while the soft tones of the deep voice and the music of the couplet hung in my ears, and presently I heard a baby voice calling: —

"The charm is a good one — one — Uncle Tom Andy Bill. I'm — almost — al-most — a-a-a-" But only the sandman heard the sweet word "sleep."

CHAPTER XII

SEARCH FOR THE TREASURE

Our hands and fingers were so numb and lifeless that we could hardly put on our clothing; but we helped each other, and after a great deal of hard work, mingled with abuse of the Indians, we dressed ourselves. We tried to eat, but that, too, was a difficult task, for we could hardly hold the wing of a prairie hen between our fingers. But we managed to satisfy our hunger, and then we lay down and tried to get a little rest. All night long we suffered greatly from our hands, but toward morning the blood began to circulate through our fingers, and life returned, little by little.

When we came out from our tepee, we saw our horses hitched to stakes before the door. We soon met several Indian men and women, but they were as meek as whipped curs and did not look us in the face. Our breakfast of prairie hen was brought to our

tent, and we were treated with every consideration.

After breakfast our great task was to be undertaken. The object of our long, hard journey was to be gained or lost. Our dreams were to be realized or were to vanish, as a cloud dissolves upon the fathomless blue. So far as I was concerned, either result would be better than the dreaming uncertainty we had lived in for so long. It is true the dreams were sweet, but they kept us in a state of frothy excitement, and we had been unable to think seriously of anything but the phantom gold since we first heard of it. Now the phantom would materialize or fade away soon after we entered Wyandotte's tepee, and we intended to enter it just as soon as we had swallowed breakfast. Now that the story of the treasure was coming to an end, we would not endure the suspense longer than was actually necessary.

Immediately after breakfast we started for Wyandotte's tepee, and found the old man lying where we had left him the night before.

"Good morning, Wyandotte," said I.

"Ugh," he answered feebly.

"Are you feeling badly?" I asked.

"Ugh," he responded, and I knew he meant "yes."

"I wish I could help you," I said. "Have you pain?"

"Heap pain here," he replied, placing his hand on his breast.

"If you will send an Indian with us to the nearest town, we will send you medicine to stop the pain," I suggested, feeling very sorry for the poor old fellow.

"No medicine will stop it," he said contemptuously.

"Yes, Wyandotte," I insisted. "We will send you a medicine that will ease the pain. It will not cure you, but it will give you rest. It is far better than fire-water."

"Ugh!" he answered, which in this instance signified consent and doubt. After a long pause, he said: "Tomandybilladdison wants the gold. No get it."

"I do want the treasure," I answered, very earnestly and quietly, "if you want me to have it. But if you want it to remain hidden forever in the cave, of no use to any one, I haven't a word to say. We helped you and you helped us, so the debt is even. The treasure is nothing to you. It is a great deal to

us, but if you are like the dog in the manger, that won't eat and won't let any one else eat, we must go away and let you die with the secret in your heart.

"You will be sorry when it is too late," I continued, "that you did not tell us where the treasure is. When you are about to die, you will wish you had told us, and 'too late' is a sad death song for a man to sing. It is like a sun that never shines, like the rain that never falls, like the flower that never blooms, like the bird that never flies, like the man that never lives. The man who dies with it on his lips turns over in his grave and moans out the sad, sad words, 'Too late, too late!' and they spoil even his pleasure in the happy hunting ground."

Wyandotte turned away from us, and we sat upon the ground waiting for him to speak. We knew we could neither bribe nor coax the secret from him. After a long silence, I said: —

"You love us and we love you. I know you would rather we should have the treasure than that any one else should get it." I paused, but he gave no sign that he had heard me, and I continued: "Is there any

one else you wish should have it? If there is, we will be glad to tell them anything that you say to us, and we will, if you wish, take them to the treasure and give it all to them. You know that Tom Andy Bill never lies."

There was no response. I was almost ready to abandon the effort, but I tried again: —

"Others of your tribe probably know where the treasure is, and when you are dead, they will sell the secret to white men for a bottle of fire-water. You will never get the treasure, and unless there is some one else you wish should have it, you might as well tell us where and how to find it."

My object in putting the question in this way was to learn if any other Indian possessed the precious secret. If so, I might be able to buy it. Wyandotte did not immediately answer my question, but after a long, trying pause, he said: —

"No one knows but Monyomo."

My heart sank, for I felt that the secret of the treasure would go to the grave with the old man who lay dying before us.

Balser and I talked to Wyandotte on many subjects, and asked a great number of ques-

tions, bearing directly or indirectly upon the treasure, but we received no response. At times we thought him asleep or dead, but now and then he coughed or moved. Aside from these manifestations of life, we might as well have been talking to a log. When we had abandoned all hope of making him talk, we sat beside his bed in silence for at least an hour. Suddenly he turned toward us and said angrily: —

"Tomandybilladdison, better go 'way — better go 'way from Indians. If Monyomo die, Indians kill Tomandybilladdison sure. Monyomo die soon."

We felt that both statements were true. It was evident that Wyandotte could not live long; and we were sure beyond a possible doubt that two white boys would quickly follow him into the dark if they remained until after he was dead.

I waited for a minute or two after he had spoken, and then I said, speaking gently: —

"You are right, Wyandotte. We must go before you die, or your friends will certainly kill us. May your god and our God help you. Good-by, Wyandotte. Shake hands with us. We want you to die knowing that

at least two white boys love you and are your friends."

He reluctantly gave his hand to us in farewell, and we started toward the door of the tepee, saying:—

"Send an Indian with us, Wyandotte, and we will give him medicine to ease your pain. Our medicine men call it opium, and I give you my word that you will have no pain if you take it. It will not cure you of your disease, but I promise you it will give you rest. It is like fire-water, but much better."

"Wyandotte will not tell you where the gold is," said the stubborn old Indian.

"No," I answered, "I don't ask you to tell us. That's all over, and you've had your way about it."

"You send the medicine that is better than fire-water anyway?" he asked.

"I promise to send it, and I promise you that it is better than fire-water and will ease your pain, and you know that the voice of Tom Andy Bill Addison is always the voice of truth. He speaks no empty words. Good-by, Wyandotte."

"Good-by, Wyandotte," said Balser.

We were passing out of the tepee slowly,

regretfully, leaving behind us our sweet dream of gold, when the old man cried out hoarsely: —

"Come back, Tomandybilladdison!"

Balser started back hurriedly, but I checked him, and we returned slowly to the Indian's bedside. Wyandotte was struggling to rise in his bed, and we helped him. He sat for a moment, coughing violently, but when the fit had passed, he pointed to a box, saying, "Bring."

Balser placed it by the bedside, and the old man, taking a key from a string that hung about his neck, began to unlock the box. I felt that our dream of gold, which had almost vanished in thin air, was about to be realized, and I trembled as a leaf shakes when the east wind breathes upon it. Balser, too, was pale and showed his agitation.

"Don't say a word," I whispered under my breath.

Wyandotte's weak hands trembled piteously and I thought he would never be able to open the box, but he finally turned the key and lifted the lid. From the box he took a roll of buckskin, and from the buckskin he took a smaller roll of parchment. With

trembling hands, he stretched the parchment on the blanket before him, and told me to hold it in place. I at once knew it was a rude map of the cave. He pointed to a spot on the map and said: —

"There!"

I examined it very carefully, but the map was so poorly drawn that I could make nothing of the marks and lines, and told him so.

"Tell us how we may find the cave, Wyandotte," said I, speaking gently and almost tenderly to the old man, for I did feel sorry for him.

"Go to the town where the fathers of the white people live — where they have a big talking house," he answered, speaking slowly and reluctantly. To give up the secret of his life was almost as hard to the Indian as to give up life itself. A painful silence followed, and I thought he was going to speak no more, but presently he continued: "Go west from that town, walking slowly from sun-up till half-noon. There see a narrow river between high banks, flowing west. Go down the river till river turns south at a stony hill like the half of an egg. Go up hill. Go

over hill, over middle of top. Go down hill in middle of hill halfway, till you see big rock, with arrow cut near the ground on south side of rock. Arrow points to cave. Two toes, two hands walk." (Forty steps away.)

"What is the name of the town, Wyandotte?" I asked.

"No know name of white man's town," he answered; "half-sun walk from river."

"From the Ohio River?" I asked.

"Ugh," he answered, and I supposed he meant "yes," though I was not at all sure.

We questioned him about the cave, but could learn nothing more definite than I have told you. In fact, it seemed that we had learned nothing at all.

"Are there many caves within the cave?" I asked.

He spread his hands apart as far as his arms could reach, meaning to say, Indian fashion, that there were so many he could not tell their number.

"Your map is not clear to us," I said. "Won't you tell me how we may know the room in which the treasure is concealed?"

He thought for a moment, and answered:

"Ask in every cave. Ask the god Wyandotte Wyolyo. Say to him, 'Gold, gold, gold,' and when you come to the right cave he will answer. There is but one cave in which he lives. There is but one room in which he will answer your question. The gold is on top of a devil's head."

He fell back upon the bed, handed me the map, and uttered the one word, "Go."

We could not induce Wyandotte to speak again, so after a half-hour spent in fruitless endeavor to learn more accurately the situation of the cave and the exact spot in which the gold was buried, we again said good-by, and left, taking the map with us.

We told an Indian that Wyandotte wanted some one to go with us to the nearest town, and the fellow went in to see the chief. When the Indian came back, he directed a young man to go with us, and five minutes later we were riding in a southeasterly direction over the prairie, both glad and sorry to leave.

The Indian that accompanied us rode an active pony and we travelled rapidly. Neither Balser nor I mentioned the treasure in the presence of our companion.

Before sundown that night we reached a small town and stopped at the tavern. We immediately sought a physician and told him what we wanted for Wyandotte. The physician prepared a large number of doses of opium and directed the Indian concerning their use. After supper the Indian started on his return trip, and never from that day to this have I seen a Wyandotte, and never again do I want to see one.

Balser and I agreed not to mention the treasure in any house, nor near any man, woman, or child. After supper we walked out in the prairie to discuss our marvellous adventure, and to talk over the meagre information we had obtained concerning the treasure.

"We're not much better off than when we started from Blue River," said I. "Wyandotte's town, where the fathers of the white people live, is rather a vague metropolis, and his directions to ask the god, Wyandotte Wyolyo, about the gold is nothing but idiotic nonsense. He might as well have told us to ask the wind. He said the gold was on a devil's head. It's all in his own head; I believe he's crazy. I'm beginning to think that

we, too, are growing 'luny,' and that there is no treasure at all."

"Well, you had better begin to think again," answered Balser, in an injured tone, "for there is a treasure and we will find it. Wyandotte told us where it is just as accurately as the poor, ignorant old savage could describe the place. All we have to do is to understand what he said. If we can't find his meaning, we don't deserve to find the gold."

"But you don't suppose his god will answer us?" I asked indignantly; "or that a devil is going to bend his head for our inspection?"

"Of course I don't," he replied. "That's not what Wyandotte meant. He meant something else, and that something else is what we must discover."

"Well, you discover it," I retorted, growing angry at Balser's stubbornness. "I'm ready to admit that it is beyond the scope of my feeble intellect. While you're on your voyage of discovery into this realm of dreams, you might try your hand, or your brain, on the question, 'Where is the town where the fathers of the white people live?' It's in the

clouds, I tell you, and I'm disgusted with it all. I'm going to quit dreaming about the gold, and I'm going to work to clear the ground and make a farm for myself. The gold has brought us to death's door twice. The third time will be the charm, and we'll die some miserable death because we have been fools enough to listen to the tale of a crazy old Indian."

"I'm surprised at you, Tom Andy Bill," said Balser, indignantly, walking away toward the town.

We went to bed early, and you may be sure we were asleep soon after our tired bodies struck the bed. In the middle of the night I was awakened by some one shaking me. It was Balser.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He put his mouth to my ear and whispered, "I know the town."

"Of course you do," I answered, with fine irony, "and you'll recognize the voice of Wyandotte Wyolyo when he answers your question, and of course you will know the devil with the gold on top of his head as soon as you see him."

"But I do know it," insisted Balser. "'The

town where the fathers of the white people live, and where they have a big talking house,' is Corydon, the old capital of Indiana. Wyandotte referred to the Governor and to the legislature when he spoke of 'the fathers of the white people,' and the capitol building is 'the big talking house.'"

"By George, you're right, Balser," I exclaimed aloud. "Just as sure as you're alive, you're right! You're no fool, Balser! I wish I had one-tenth your brains."

He put his hand over my mouth, and again whispered, "Let's get up and go out on the prairie."

We arose, dressed hurriedly, and walked some distance out of town into the open prairie, where we could speak of our precious secret with no fear that it would be discovered. There we discussed the question, and Balser had little difficulty in convincing me that his interpretation of Wyandotte's words was correct. But the old man's instructions directing us to ask his god about the gold seemed to me to cast doubt on all he had told us.

Balser, with his usual persistency, said: "Never you mind, Tom Andy Bill. We'll learn the meaning of that, too. Just let us

find the cave, and I'd almost stake my life we'll find the gold."

Next morning we started out early across the trackless prairie, headed for another town that lay in the general direction of home. Before we had been riding an hour, we determined not to go directly home, but to make our way straight to Corydon. If we went home, we should have to give some explanation for continuing our trip to Corydon; and if our search for the treasure were to fail after we had told the object of our mission, we should return to Blue River a pair of crestfallen boys, to be laughed at by our friends.

" I'll go with you this time, Balser," said I, " but it is the last fool's errand I'll undertake in search of this phantom gold."

"This trip is all I'll ever ask you to make," he answered. "This time we'll get the gold, gold, gold!" He was already beginning to speak to Wyandotte Wyolyo, the god.

Balser's enthusiasm was infectious, and I had caught it long before we reached Corydon.

Three weeks after leaving the Wyandotte village we reached Corydon, the old capital of Indiana. After arriving at the quaint old town, we began preparations for visiting the

cave, and for exploring it in case we found it. We laid in a supply of provisions, bought one skillet (our only cooking utensil), two tin cups, two tin plates, knives, and forks. We also bought five dozen candles, two large oil lanterns, wicks, and oil. We determined not to depend upon our tinder box for light, but laid in a supply of sulphur matches and bought two small, water-tight metal match cases that we intended to carry with us on our journey through the cave.

We had been lost once in a dark cave, and we had no notion of being caught in the same predicament again. To further guard against being lost, we bought a thousand feet of twine in balls. We meant to fasten one end of the string at the mouth of the cave, and then expected to carry the balls of twine with us, unwinding them as we went in. All these articles we stored in our saddle-bags.

Our outfit was so complete that I told Balser we probably should have the luck of the man who went fishing with too much bait. He caught no fish. But Balser's faith never flagged, and I had more confidence than I was willing to express.

We started west one morning at sun-up,

and within two or three hours came to the deep, narrow river flowing between high banks, described by Wyandotte. The discovery that the old Indian had told the truth about the river seemed to give a flavor of verity to his entire story. When we first saw the river, Balser cried out delightedly: —

"Here's the river, Tom Andy Bill, and I believe every word the poor old savage said was true!"

"Do you believe his god will tell us where the gold is?" I asked.

"Yes, I do," he answered. "I don't know what he meant, but I'm going to follow his instructions."

"Perhaps you had better commence praying to his god at once," I suggested. "It would be a fine start for us to begin our treasure hunt by breaking the first commandment."

"If I felt as you do about this matter, I'd go home," answered Balser.

I laughed and said, "Don't say a word."

We followed the river bank as closely as possible, and when the stream turned south, sure enough, there to the right, that is, on the north side of the river, was a high, stony

hill shaped like the half of an egg. When Balser saw the hill, he could hardly breathe for excitement, and I must confess that my heart, too, was working pretty hard.

The side of the hill was steep and rocky, but at the top there was a small grove of trees. When we reached the foot of the hill, we dismounted; and after a hard climb, arrived at the top, where we halted in the grove, unloaded, and hitched the horses to trees. It was nearly supper time, but we could not wait to eat. We were so excited that for once in our lives our appetites deserted us. We gave the horses a few ears of corn, and started down the "middle of the north side of the hill."

We had climbed it from the south, we had passed over the "middle of the top," and then we started down the "middle of the north side."

We had hardly gone halfway down the hill when Balser cried out:—

"There's the arrow, Tom Andy Bill! There's the arrow!"

Sure enough, right before us was the arrow, pointing east. We instantly started in the direction indicated by the arrow; and when

we had taken a few steps, we turned and faced each other, dumb with amazement, for right before us was the overhanging rock that covered the opening to the cave we had already explored. On our former visit we had approached the hill from the north side, and on this occasion we had failed to recognize it because we had come upon it from the south.

To say that we were disappointed doesn't half tell the story. We had searched every nook and corner of the cave, and we felt sure there was no treasure to be found in it. Even Balser's enthusiasm was dampened, and without a word we started up the hill to our horses, ate our supper, lay down in our blankets, and went to sleep, — a pair of sadly disappointed boys. When we awakened next morning we were very downhearted, but after breakfast Balser said : —

" We're here, and we might as well explore the cave again. We may have missed some part of it when we were here before. We are so well prepared that we can explore it now without risk of being lost. I want to see The Marble Room by a good light, anyway."

I, too, wanted to see the cave again ; so we prepared the lamps, took a dozen candles,

fastened one end of the twine at the opening of the cave, and entered upon our second exploration of this wonderful cavern. We entered, lighted our torches, and unwound the twine as we proceeded. A few minutes' walk brought us to the wonderful marble chamber, and we again examined every square foot of the room. As on our former visit, we were soon convinced that no treasure was concealed in that chamber.

While we were pondering gloomily over our second failure, Wyandotte's instructions to call to the god occurred to Balser, and lifting his face as if in prayer, he exclaimed, "Gold, gold, gold!"

No answer came, and I laughed. His call to Wyandotte Wyolyo reminded us of Monyomo's map. I took it from my pocket and, by the light of the lanterns, examined the rude tracings. We easily recognized the route through the cave up to the marble chamber in which we were sitting, but if Wyandotte's map was correct, there were still many rooms beyond.

We had not been able to find an opening leading from the marble chamber, save the one by which we had entered, but after ex-

amining the map, Balser sprang to his feet and began trying to move the rocks that rested near the wall of the cavern. I joined in the labor, and soon I heard a cry of delight from my friend. I looked and saw that he had moved a large rock, and that in front of him was a low opening penetrating the stone wall of the chamber.

"Here is the opening represented by the dim line on Wyandotte's map," cried Balser, "and I'm sure it leads to the chamber indicated by the circular line on the parchment."

We examined the opening and found it so small that to pass through it we must lie upon our breasts. For a moment we hesitated to enter, but no danger would have balked Balser in his determination to find the treasure. He lay down upon his breast, and, pushing the lamp before him, crawled into the low, narrow tunnel, and I crawled after him, pushing my lantern ahead of me.

After covering a distance of ten or fifteen yards in the tunnel, we came to a point where it made a sharp turn at right angles. Here the tunnel was so narrow that we were compelled to turn upon our sides to enable us to

pass the angle. It was "scary" work, I tell you; but after a long, hard spell of playing snake, we emerged into another beautiful marble chamber, more marvellous even than the first.

We easily searched the new room, but found no possible hiding place for the treasure. Here, too, Balser lifted his face to the ceiling and called out, "Gold, gold, gold!" but no answering voice of the god greeted us. Again I laughed, and Balser thought my levity was far amiss. The passageways to other chambers were all large, and in a short time we had examined eight or ten beautiful rooms.

In each chamber Balser called, "Gold, gold, gold!" and I always found it very funny, much to his disgust. We had been in the cave perhaps four or five hours when we entered a chamber that was more lofty and more beautiful than any we had yet seen. Balser at once turned his face to the ceiling and made his adjuration to Wyandotte Wyolyo, "Gold, gold, gold!"

I again felt like laughing, but I didn't laugh, for to my surprise there came a reverberating answer, loud at first, but diminishing to a

ghostly whisper: "GOLD, GOLD, *gold*, gold, g-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-old!"

"An echo," said I, awed by the wonderful response.

"Yes, that's what Wyandotte meant," answered Balser. "Now, if we don't fall dead from excitement, we'll have that treasure pretty soon."

We lighted our candles, placing them about at points best suited to illuminate the chamber, and, with lanterns in hand, proceeded to search the wonderful place. I had taken a shovel in with me, and Balser had carried a pick, so we were prepared to commence digging as soon as we found a soft spot in the rock. But the floor was of solid stone, and in ten minutes we were convinced that the treasure could not be buried in the cave of the echo.

Our excitement, of course, was great. Our nerves were wrought to the highest pitch. The cave was cool, but we had discarded our coats and were perspiring like wheat-binders in July. We went over and over every square foot of the place, and were almost wild with despair. When we heard the echo, we felt that the treasure was surely ours, and to come

down from the glittering heights of expectancy to the black depths of disappointment was like falling from heaven to the other place.

I thought Balser was going to cry, so I took him by the arm and led him to the foot of a great white column that stood in the centre of the chamber. Being very tired, we sat down upon a rock that jutted out from the base of the column. After we had been sitting there a few minutes, I happened to glance up, and noticed that pieces of the crystal rock, similar to the one on which we were sitting, projected from the main stem at intervals of two or three feet, almost to the top. I remarked carelessly to Balser: —

"One might climb to the top of this column."

I had hardly uttered the words when Balser exclaimed: "On top of a devil's head!"

He at once began to climb, and I, grasping his thought, instantly followed him with the nimbleness of a mountain goat. We each reached the top of the column at almost the same instant, and I nearly fell to the rock floor, twenty feet beneath us, for there on the

top of the beautiful white "devil," were five iron-bound chests.

"Gold, gold, gold, at last!" cried Balser.

"LAST, LAST, *last*, — la-a-a-a-ast —" answered the god, Wyandotte Wyolyo.

The refrain was uncanny and almost froze my blood. The awful word "last" seemed to tell me that it was the last of Balser and me, and my heart almost grew cold with fear at the thought that we might never get out of the cave alive, and that this marvellous chamber would be our "last, last, last" resting place.

I was nearly ready to faint, but Balser's excitement gave him strength, and I borrowed a little from him for the time being. We feasted our eyes on the five chests until we were full of them, and then we took them down the column, one by one.

We were greatly disappointed in the size of the chests, for they were not more than seven or eight inches square, by three or four inches deep, and we could see that the boards composing them were quite thick. I don't know how large we expected the chests to be. To tell the truth, we had no idea how much space a thousand dollars in

gold would occupy, but these chests were so small that we feared they could not, all together, contain the half of a thousand dollars.

Though we were sadly disappointed in the size of the chests, we lost no time in opening them with our pick, and I shall never forget the sight that greeted our eyes. Never before nor since has gold looked so beautiful. There it lay in a great pile of beautiful double eagles. We opened all the chests and poured the gold out on the stone floor of the cavern, where we counted six hundred pieces of twenty dollars each.

Balser left me with the gold and went to fetch sacks in which to carry it. He took up the twine string, allowing it to slip through his fingers in guiding him to the mouth of the cave. He was gone a long time; at least it seemed long to me, for I was very lonesome waiting in the cave, and dreaded crawling back through "worm alley," as we called the narrow tunnel.

When Balser returned we divided the gold into equal parts, put it in the sacks, and, leaving the empty chests behind us, started for the mouth of the cave.

We met with no adventure worth mentioning on our return trip to Blue River.

I reached home just after supper time one evening, hurriedly put up my horse, slipped into the house without giving warning of my approach, and entered the sitting room carrying my precious sack — which weighed about thirty pounds — over my shoulder.

My mother and my sisters ran to greet me, and after kissing them, I walked over to father, who was sitting by the fire. I shook hands with him and put the sack down on the floor beside him, saying kind o' careless like: —

"There's a present for you, father;" and he said kind o' careless like: —

"What is it, son?"

"Oh, nothing much," said I; "just gold."

Well, you should have seen father and mother and my sisters pounce on that sack and pour the yellow fellows out on the table.

The girls asked twenty questions at once, but I said: "I'll tell you the whole story after I have had some supper. I'm hungry as a bear."

I looked about the room. There were my three sisters, Nan, Betty, and Sue, my father and my mother —

"Where — where is — is Mab?" I asked. Then mother and the girls covered their faces with their aprons and began to cry. Presently father rose from his chair, came to me, placed his hand lovingly on my shoulder, and said, in a low, trembling voice: —

"They have taken her from us, son. I fought them in the courts until I could fight no more; but the law had its way, and they took her from us."

* * * * * *

Well, the gold turned to ashes for me then and there, and gold has been ashes for me ever since.

Five years afterward we got a letter from Mab telling us that she had been forced to marry a man chosen by her people to be her husband, and that she was very unhappy. Soon after receiving the letter, mother died, and father did not long survive her. Sue and Betty got married, and Nan and I lived together in the old house.

Seven or eight years after receiving Mab's letter, a carriage from the town of Blue River stopped in front of our door, and out stepped Mab with a baby girl. Maybe she wasn't welcome! Ah, what a glad day that was!

"I have run away from them all," said Mab. "They are hard, cruel people, and my husband was the worst of all. I could not endure life with him one day longer, so I took little Mab and ran away from him, and have come back to you, Tom Andy Bill, for protection."

"Well, I reckon you've come to the right place," said I.

They tried to make her leave us again, but I kept a dozen rifles loaded, and notified her people that there would be a series of funerals if any of them placed foot on my farm.

Mab lived with Nan and me three years, and died, leaving us little four-year-old Mab. Her father tried to take her from us, but I lawed him till she was eighteen years old. Then she got married and lived in the old house for many years after we moved into the new one. But she and her husband died, as you all know, not long since, and they left to me — to me —

At that point the old man stopped speaking, placed his hand on Mab's curls, and after a long pause, continued: —

"I reckon my title to *her* is good. I'll kill

any man that says it isn't." So he took Baby Mab in his arms and pressed her to his breast.

Then we rose and left Uncle Tom Andy Bill alone with his great sorrow, and his greater joy, for we knew that the story was told.

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"Tom Andy Bill" was a boy with Elser Brent and Tom Fox and the other boys of Blue River settlement in the Indiana of pioneer days. In this book he is an old uncle, with no less than fourteen adopted children. They all gather about the fire on winter nights, and he tells them these true stories of bears and Indian treasure. What a lucky family, to have an uncle with such memories! We are lucky, too, because the oldest "nephew" was studying stenography, and he took down these dozen best stories for practice. They are the kind to read about the fire, just as they were told, to a group of boys and girls from ten years old up.

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